

Palimpsest

H.D.



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Palimpsest

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TO BRYHER

*Stars wheel in purple, yours is not so rare
as Hesperus, nor yet so great a star
as bright Aldeberan or Sirius,
nor yet the stained and brilliant one of War;*

*stars turn in purple, glorious to the sight;
yours is not gracious as the Pleiads are
nor as Orion's sapphires, luminous;*

*yet disenchanted, cold, imperious face,
when all the others blighted, reel and fall,
your star, steel-set, keeps lone and frigid trist
to freighted ships, baffled in wind and blast.*

HIPPARCHIA.

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Palimpsest

H.D.

Hipparchia

I cast my lot with cynics, not with women seated at the distaff

Hipparchia—Antipater of Sidon

Baffled, he swung backward. The room unexpectedly to his strained vision, was empty of her. Half expectant, entirely oblivious of her own wishes in this or in any matter, it was borne upon him for almost the first time in their some half year's intimacy, how great, how overmastering was this peculiar longing. The room, as always, lay as it were lighted, some peculiar honey-coloured hyacinth, from its own freshness. Cold, with the curtain toning a flaming afternoon sun to the yellow of that very grape (he insisted it was yellow) some girl had laid in temple corridor. Some poet, one of her eternal Greeks, had written it. Therefore the fruit must be white and cold and yellow. She had said, "I think differently but what does it matter? *That* poem, Marius, is religion." He had bickered, replied that with *her* religion was in its final decadence. That religion was a matter of social form, of civic outlook and that Greece was now lost, the cities disassociated from any central ruling." "The best of them are overbuilt by the new invading strength of Roman populace, who on the very levelled ruins build new foundation for a mightier empire. Corinth—" She had cut him with her civility. Her voice spoke triumphant over that disaster. Simply, "Marius; Corinth." Her words had that peculiar softness of outline that in her most intense utterance could so annoy him. The very language (he was deftly, like cultivated Romans of that period, bi-lingual) would at such times escape him, leaving him baffled, a child learning an alphabet. "Marius; Corinth." It might mean as she stressed it, lingering on soft syllable, anything. He might know no Greek. But "Rome," he continued unrebuked by her suave utterance, "Builds rock upon the ruins of a decadent civilisation." She said, "have you heard, Marius, how the grape gives sweetness?" He said, "it grows, flowers, is cut down in its decaying." "Ah, no," she worried him, "I don't mean useless wild grapes. Nor those temporarily planted for ornament or mere shade. Ripe, actually gathered from vineyards, shaken from the parent, broken, sometimes ruthless from the firm vine. Cast ruthless in one basket. Carried and flung indiscriminate, fine white by heady ruby of the vine into one huge vessel of destruction. Romans are wine pressers." He said, "not badly spoken; you do give us credit sometimes." She said, "you spoke lightly of great Corinth. Sea-girls gird it in some way you know not. Rome battering upon Grecian citadels leaves foot mark of red, stain of its wine-treaders." He continued, "wine then flows from you, Greek intoxicant." He came always heady to that final recrimination.

"I'm not, Marius, personal. I mean you kill us, cut our city and our state to pieces. Do you kill the wine when you press heavy on the grape-bunch?" He said, "no, where in your eternal meanderings do you lead us? Can't you ever be frank (your eternal subtleties)-outspoken in this?" She said, "Phoebus speaks doubly and his word cuts doubly." When she named Phoebus he, in his turn, became voluble, insistent, over-bearing. He feared somewhat the priestess in Hipparchia.

He saw now the room almost for the first time in their six months' intimacy. Almost for the first time he saw the room a thing apart, cold, smooth, a flower, something on its own, with a peculiar and imbuing fragrance. Tall spike of gold, she had been wont to be found standing as if arisen in her potent courtesy, having heard beyond the drawn saffron of the curtains, the footstep some paces off, even so far as the first shallow upward flight of stone stairs that led into her garden. It seemed, tall golden spike of some pulsating lily, that she had risen always at some distinct recognition of his footsteps, his only that clanged somewhat heavily as he gained (across the tiny stretch of lawn or along the sand-strewn path, lined with its saffron, its crocus, its tiny dart of winter flowering dwarf-iris) dragging somewhat heavily after his long manoeuvres, the marble of the outer atrium. Standing (had she ever failed him?) by her low chair swung with soft leather and piled with dove-down cushions, with arms of lion, inset (in the Egyptian manner) with eyes and lion-smile outlined with lapis. So standing by the low chair, she had seemed always a creature somewhat withdrawn yet utterly and irrevocably vanquished.

Evil was in him, the old Roman fortitude in his case as in that of other young patricians, was latterly overbalanced with new found sense of power. Fashion tolerated exuberant militaristic manifestations and to Corinth not alone among Grecian cities was the late-penned tribute of Antipater applicable.

Marius, like all cultivated Romans now belittled the Sidonian who had at one time fired Rome's court with pathos and with flame of Greek intensity. Greek intensity was short lived in Rome. Antipater of Sidon had perhaps foolishly broken with his patron when he had penned blithely and as if in utter indifference to the consequence, that exquisite comment on imperial policy.

*Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines?
your citadel, your towered wall, your line
of noble women? your ancient treasure?
and that ten-thousand of your people lost?*

*War wreaked on you his hideous ravishment,
we, we alone, Neriads inviolate,
remain to weep, with the sea gulls to chant,
Corinth is lost, Corinth is desolate.*

Hipparchia speaking that, remarking as prelude that perhaps Antipater had not shown wisdom in so questioning Rome's authority, had been wont to strike a peculiar serpent twisting in his entrails. She spoke so sweetly of this. So gently that only Marius, after some six months' intimacy, could dream that she was pressing with exquisite Medea-insouciance a hard blade of ironic and decrying steel within his entrails. "Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines?" Others spoke laughingly of this. In the barracks it was common food for ribaldry. But as his friend Sergius Gaius aptly put it, "to bed with these fair Greeks. Conquerors? Roma vincit." It was never true. It had with him been otherwise. He had never brought to her thin lips, cut fine yet rather colourless, that cry that proved Rome conqueror. He hated her yet waited on her entrance, himself somewhat servile, heavy, serf-like, weary, as suddenly in a moment he was flooded with a realisation of his peculiar longing.

II

He seemed inconsequently to himself, to be penned in some pig-stye of illusion. Flesh turned gross to his hand plucking half-wittedly on coarsened hand. Fingers, in a manner totally unfamiliar to his full-blooded wholesomeness, twisted like some underbred tormented galley slave, fingers, hands. While his head on its bull-throat bent forward, his tongue (he almost would seem to visualise it) outlollled in some thirst anguish. He flicked an imaginary floating gold web from before his eyelids. Did Hipparchia's chamber hold some scented death-root? Some fine-ground powder sprinkled as these new Asiatics had taught in most vicious circles, drug to bring vision, to spell destruction? Before his eyes a web seemed filmed of gold-gauze. The very substance of the flesh he had so brutally and so often grappled with. Plunge dagger into a gold lily. What more was she, had she in her most intimate encounters given him? You might as well plunge dagger into the cold and unresponsive flesh of some tall flower.

Hipparchia. Witchcraft. Illusion. Poetry. She made of poetry as she spoke it, her tongue dwelling viciously, it would seem (with an intensifying beauty on syllables that she must have realised ate into him, scalded, flayed him) some new invented Asiatic torture. He straightened on thick throat the rather well-modelled youthful chin, the nose straight as need be for aristocratic preference, the forehead white enough in all conscience, the ears set close under the dark cap

of military almost gladiatorially cropped hair. Across the forehead, was a rim as of some binding, searing metal. The nose burnt, a little coarsened, was darkened, as the chin and cheek-bones, with exposure. He sat now the low incurved backless lion-footed foot-stool like Marius Decius, all that he was of Roman, at the head of his charging and blood-thirsting legions.

So perched, young, defiant, enough aristocrat, too much a Roman, he faced (outwardly triumphant) the form, rather wistful, languid, tormented that entered with no sign of apparent lapse, the double folding curtains.

"Decius attends?" "Some half hour, Hipparchia. And it occurred to me, sitting here, that your room held some witchery." She questioned (fallen somewhat detached, listless into her usual armchair) with uplifted level brows, and he continued, "something uncanny in the smell of it. The feel of it. Something in the way the sun crawls through the saffron of your curtain different from other afternoons." She waited pleasantly attentive. "Something in you, Hipparchia, that in your absence I half apprehended, that in your presence utterly escapes me." She remarked pleasantly "Decius jests. He becomes eloquent." He answered, "I know one adequate eloquence. Let's to it."

She answered, "I'm tortured, unaccountably overwrought." He straightened, his usual trained control answering here as always in emergency. "Well, tell me." While she answered unexpectedly, "I am sick heartily of Romans."

He said, sensing in a moment perhaps that she was tired of him, quick to save the dignity of Marius Decius, "Hipparchia, our friend, the ex-aedile Verrus who persists in his fancy for you, leaves presently for Capua. Will you go with him?" She answered, "I have said, that I was tired of Romans." He answered, now whipped somewhat in his self-esteem, "and I heartily of Greeks."

She answered, "why bicker then about it? I have struggled too hard to escape them. I'm apparently foredoomed and never able." He said "don't concern yourself unwantonly with this. As a friend of an officer of the Imperial Legion you have, against all outward officialdom, adequate protection." She said, "I don't mean you, Decius. I thought that you might save me. I don't mean the shouting and aggressive ribaldry, the bullies of the civic guardsmen, these policemen. I don't mean, in fact, any outer circumstance." He answered, suddenly heartily fatigued with this ruined meeting, "well, what then have you tried so to escape from?" She answered, "that hard old philosopher, my father, Crates the cynic. That lovely wraith who followed blindly, cynic and philosopher, Hipparchia, who piled garment, purplefringed, gold-embroidered (ah, if I could forget her) and trailed in grey coarse

linen, after my foolish father." He said, "Your father Crates, the cynic, your mother, the wise Hipparchia are both dead." She answered, "since when, Decius, has one been able to escape the dead?"

He was used to argument in her, to exposition in the Hellenic manner. He had listened often enough and ardently but this naked, headlong gaping upon death was too much for him. She spoke long and fervently of poetry, had even on occasion declaimed the tribute of that very Antipater on the dead Hipparchia.

*I cast my lot with cynics, not
with women seated at the distaff,
weighted with silk and ornament!*

*I kept no tunic with bright gem,
nor shoes the Asiatics wear,
nor than myrrh-scented diadem!*

*but this, the sack, the beggar's stick
to go with it, the cloak full thick
to suit my taste, for bed the ground!*

and so on. He couldn't recall facing her, the actual wording of the final couplet. He lost somewhat hold on an intellect not altogether commonplace and not altogether, even when judged by the new Hellenic standards, to be despised. He ruminated, fixing his attention (that again seemed dangerously near to wandering) on the very form that faced him. But though he gazed straight on at the saffron-clothed woman, he could not place her. Yes it was, could be no other than the somewhat exotic high-strung girl that he had singled out from the usual exuberant crowd at the house of his brother-in-law. The girl had recited in the customary manner (after the withdrawal of the preliminary dancers) poetry. Declaimed in the usual manner. Somewhat (the criticism had been) "too intensely." She did not seem inordinately pedantic as one might have thought from the pretensions Lucullus put forward for her. Lucullus had explained his romantic finding of her on some curious expedition with some young relative who was shot dead on the out-works of their temporary encampment (even then Lucullus' envoys were making their first tentative essays toward the Mithradateans) and his sending her with his message-bearers back to Rome. His brother-in-law Lucullus' Olivia had remarked simply that men disliked her. That might well have been. Decius (and an occasional brother officer following the fashion of Decius' so far flawless taste) to prove exception.

"You have chosen your career," he said tersely. "It is no mean one here in Rome." She said, "career or no, I don't cast slur on your protection

of me. But can you deny it? I've never physically given you fair payment." He said, "I would rather sit facing you in this cool half light than wrestle with the most ardent of the Suburbs." She said, "ah, ah, ah" and speaking simply that bright syllable that cut upward into the thickening of the saffron of that afternoon's late sun-light, he was reminded of some dead city. "Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines?" Hipparchia, he saw it, stunned into some curious illusion, the sudden overmastering and unexpected fear of losing her, was no woman. It was that, adequately facing her, that he in that terse moment apprehended. She wasn't, any more than the dead Hipparchia was. "Your citadel, your towered wall?" She was something come to plague, to destroy. It was for this that she had condescended. It was for this that she had heartily and without hesitation accepted the invitation (tended through his friend Lucullus, by way of that gold and black tyrant, Olivia his mistress) to become the companion of Marius Decius. If she had waited (his hand plucked feverishly at his coarsened hand, fingers interlocking and untwisting in the manner of some ill-trained nerveless servant) it was for his undoing. "Since when, Decius, has one been able to escape the dead?"

Honey-coloured hyacinth. That was all she had done. Taken parasitic root in him. In her was no whit of human emotion, as there was no trace of real affection or of real consideration. (Why anyway should one entirely credit Lucullus' romantic story of the finding of her straying after wild-plants in Macedonia with a mysterious companion shot at sight for some Greek spy examining their outworks?) For what girl, what woman, favoured among the lost rabble, the sweepings of the broken states and cities of dispersed Hellas, would so casually let go a wealthy, considerate, and if he said it, virile and robustly handsome Roman patron? It was not done. That was all to be said for it. It was not for a woman, however gold and webbed over with illusion to so, as it were, take congé. It was for him, young Decius, with some weary, well-turned gesture to intimate that to him her charm was over. Such as he and his galaxy of brother officers would not let such a one as saffron Hipparchia, a Greek, perish. Greeks were received into the most conservative Roman circles. The upper and the better classes were wont to employ such as Hipparchia as her years betrayed her, as tutors to their daughters, their sons even when so highly specialised in literature and grammar and the intellectual accomplishments as was Hipparchia. She might even (he grew practical, brotherly) marry.

Practical, indulgent, over-conscientious, he remarked, "you might, Hipparchia, marry." She did not trouble to laugh at him, he was so silly. Sitting, facing her, he seemed fat, empty, like some overgrown tuberous vegetable. Such vegetables as she had been wont to

unearth in her wild childhood with snails and underground creatures for that first love her uncle, the queer cynic Crates' half-brother. Butterflies, snails, separate bodies of green, gold and mottled lizard. Strange grub-like creatures and even little animals for which she and her thin young foster-father had built up cages of bracken and peeled willow, or kept alive in shallow baskets lined with the weed found indigenous to the field they crept in. Her uncle guarded strange roots they had gathered in the hills and strange plants grubbed out of distant rivers. "To make a book that will rival the Athenian Theophrastus," he had boasted. They had not the advantages of Theophrastus, inheritor of Aristotle's famous garden, nor did they have odd curious, cotton, pepper, palm and lotus root shipped them from the distant provinces as that lucky Theophrastus to whom the Macedonian's generals offered tribute of pressed leaf and dried Indian root and seed-pod. They had had enough for a book though. Things even Theophrastus had missed out. Those things. Where was it? Where was she? Was this facing her in sodden, heavily-peopled Rome? The man she had chosen with deliberate foresight as her lover.

"Ah," she said, "Marius." She seemed recalled like someone jerked crudely back from gazing in the depth of some sorcerer's crystal. She said, "Marius, I have tried to understand you." He stood at attention. "And I you, Hipparchia."

She continued. "But never in my most despondent moments did I visualise a cabbage." He said, seeming in a second to find the clue, "you are, are you then, really mad?" She said, "not at all Marius. But when one has slept perhaps on a rough estimate, one hundred and fifty times with a one man, it is, can you not see, somewhat of a shock, at the end, to find it has not been a man at all, merely a rather bulbous vegetable. No, I apologise, no cabbage but a turnip."

He said, "your jests are somewhat untimely, white Hipparchia. For I have just discovered that if we have, as you roughly count it on your eternal quest of perfect Attic verity some hundred and fifty times (it is not so often) slept together, that I slept not with a woman but a phantom." The room taking on the thick colour of sunset webbed over further as if by pollen of vine-blossom and down sifted gold dust of the meadow-saffron (that curious curtain, one of her Greek possessions) seemed to him now awful. As if the very substance of the light webbed in that late sun, in that room, with that wanfaced, wild, thin woman was the very gay wedding garment (he searched his mind for a vague remembered image ah—) Medea wrought for Jason. A garment that as he drew it on, clung close and poisoned him with a thousand evil pricklings. It was perhaps as well that he were quite done with her. He flung as last inspiration, "your face, dear girl. How could I so cabbage-like have missed it? You are simply wan, wearied with an

earlier lover." She stood waiting for his departure, her eyes in that darkening, thickening glow of the late sunset opening, widening, her eyebrows cut across, above them, hieratic, like the inner black on the very iris petal. Black, like the inner hieratic marking on the honey-coloured hyacinth. He saw, in that thickening of the last glow of late sunlight, her eyebrows apart, separated from her being. As Greeks of the old days disregarded the sheer substance of the flower as they perceived (mysterious script) the aie, aie that tells of lost Adonis or the wail for the dead Spartan. He saw why Greeks inordinately must rule forever, not Rome, but prophetically, the whole world. They had explained. He said, "well your eyebrows in these deeping shadows still retain form, you are lost, obliterated, only the scent of a saffron lily meets me. Though you in this light are lost, Hipparchia, and your being gives out the fragrance of that death-flower, the honey-coloured hyacinth, I, like Phoebus reading his love's name on the flowerleaf, may yet take comfort. Your eyebrows, Hipparchia, deft black, pencilled for my dismissal are engraved somewhat on my spirit, if Rome has yet a spirit. I take comfort in departure, reading across your wide brow the letters of allusion. Aie, aie. Your Greek script aie. And in my Roman I will simply parry Ave." She caught his arm, lifted to part of the curtain, "Comfort me, Marius."

III

She said, "a bargain is a bargain Marius, I do not give you satisfaction." He lay weary, his young throat, loosened from its tunic, lost its burnt-brown where the garment usually (or the heavy armour) covered it; his upper arm bare, heavily muscled, yet white with some suggestion almost of womanliness, a fragment of later, more voluptuous marble, was outlined against the wine-red coverlet of the couch they lay on. He murmured heavily; he turned as a huge child, his head from the stuffed dove-down pillow. The heavy gold fringe framed, like some of the newer marbles, his white forehead, his chin, soft yet clear in outline, the nose straight enough for aristocratic preference, the ears set beautifully close to the cropped head. Beside him propped up with straight thin neck emerging from the crocus-shift, her undergarment, was Hipparchia. She sat, half propped aloft, a second darker cushion framed her now set face, features carved, honey-marble after the archaic unfashionable manner of the early Hellenes. She repeated, "I only want one thing of you and having got it, I am done with Marius." He moved closer, his head like an enormous child seeking her shoulder. When he lay there she, for all her stark archaic splendour, moved simply; her left arm enclosed him with a simple gesture, a young Demeter enfolding a dark fosterling.

She held him in her thin arm. He moved beneath it like some huge tired fosterling. She repeated. "I know it's wrong. It's out of all proportion. I don't want you, Marius." He said, weary, profoundly stirred by this renewed intimacy, "Don't talk of anything. Tell me about that Macedonian black lamb." She laughed, strange uncanny high pitched, her last conjured up the vision of an angular, tall child (herself) racing along Arcadian water-courses. Her hair, short now as then, loosed from its tight head-band, out-rayed by some Assyrian deity. Hipparchia's hair would never grow to any conscionable beauty. Yet tucked back in its tight head-band, it was the hair of Helios smoothed into its fillet, the hair of Hyacinth under its diadem, the hair of Artemis before years had defined into womanliness that stark girl face, the hair of young Hippolyta. It was her least noticeable beauty. Yet catching the flesh tones' peculiar honey shade in its straight mesh, it made her one, a single substance, chin out thrust, nose blurred somewhat yet obviously of a piece with the thin face oval, with the eyebrows' odd precision, with the very shape of their head's rather heightened contour, of the crown inviolate; in beauty it was a marble dug from the Acropolis, from the buried debris of the Persians' conquest, before Phidias and Apelles had set their mark upon it. Her laugh somewhat ill-fitting that honey-shade that marks archaic marble, was silver, stark, ill-matching the mellow outline as she lay there. Her laugh, high, hysterical, at variance with her outward set composure, woke always in Marius the feeling that after all, the girl was not awakened. He had only to wait to bring to the thin, rather colourless lips the stark agonising cry for pity that would finally prove Rome conqueror. Hipparchia said, holding him, drawing him closer with a maternal gesture that was quite unconscious, "the black curly wool lamb, you mean, who ate our specimens?"

She said, "Philip, my father's young brother, had spread them along the stone ledge of the shepherd's cottage that we lived in. Hipparchia had given away her gold shoes with the straps wrought in the Lydian manner with interwreathing ivy and with vine leaf. Hipparchia had said that wisdom demands all things and she went off with Crates, my wisened, foolish father. So I hated wisdom. Philip said he hated wisdom of the sort that must show some outer semblance of differing from one's neighbour. We all agreed that Great Wisdom herself had perished finally, when after Macedon's swollen policy, the Romans had attacked us. I think Hipparchia's grey coarse linen was in mourning for our Corinth which, after all, though we were part of the Aegean islands, we belonged to."

Marius turning his dark head, cropped in the gladiatorial manner, close into this sweet-scented crocus of her undergarment, remarked sleepily, "sweet Hipparchia. *Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines?* Have I not been made enough to suffer for the war-lust

of my ancestors?" She said, not understanding the low murmur, but feeling through the thin crocus of her garment the warm breath of Marius, half sleeping, "it's this way, Marius. Philip himself even then was one of the spiritually already saved. He isn't dead for all the Rome that broke him. He and my father were in some ways singularly allied though opposite. Crates, my father, cynical and unworldly, might, I have always thought, relinquish my mother in his wanderings. In his philosophical I mean as well as in his material pilgrimages. He might have left her to us. Philip was so much younger. Philip might have been a sort of son even to young Hipparchia. Perhaps I exaggerate. They seem to me beside you heavy sodden Romans, so young; the yellow iris and the white iris and the blue iris and the pale-blue iris and the small dwarf-iris that holds an essentially different blue in its close flower texture. You see, Philip and I knew every kind of wild flower."

Marius said, roused, propped gracious on one elbow, drawn back, regarding as in perspective this tall erect form, that sat, back square against the dark of the head pillows, the close mesh of strange hair making a soft, pollen-glow in the soft darkness, "I, too, Hipparchia, have somewhat specialised in wild flowers." She answered (perceiving his eyes crinkled, like a great bee's face, drawn distinct from her) that he seemed like a great drone with a dark head, in its proportion a giant drone out of one of the Aristophanic comedies she had never cared for. He said, yes, all Rome was that, heavy and swollen with pride and with pretensions and arrogance. "But could Greece live, queen, insolent but near extinction, without the heavy drone again to fertilise her?" She considered him, "you too a naturalist?" He answered, "it is the fashion nowadays," and put foot, firm arched of that same unbelievably white texture where the boot had sheltered it, on the deep purple of the dyed rug. Then, so sitting for a moment the better to regard her, he drew the heavy wine-red of the coverlet with a careful woman gesture, square across her, smoothed back the wine-red; uncovered legs, crossed beneath their thin undergarment, and the body of Hipparchia, sitting erect as Europa on some field carpet of anemone; drew back the wine-red once more to enfold Hipparchia and slid in again beside her, "Hipparchia who knows everything so cleverly, so patently knows nothing." She struggled against the warm smothering of his kisses, warm and flower-breathing like that very animal that smothered young Europa. "Ah, but I do, I do know Marius." Well he demonstrated for the one hundred and fifty-second time (as Hipparchia would count it) that Hipparchia was heartless.

IV

He saw it now, trembling and jibbering as if with some strange attack of old marsh-fever that he had thought, aided by the Dictator's late

Tyrian physician, he was well rid of. He saw, jibbering in a cold dawn, the form beside him was adequately no woman. What proof, he asked himself, had he that Hipparchia was Hipparchia the daughter of Crates, the cynic, and of his wife the woman of whom (now he recalled the final couplet that had this very afternoon escaped him) Antipater the late Roman favourite had once written,

*my fame exceeds (as Wisdom's must
excell mere winners of hill games)
Atlanta's of Mount Menelaus.*

Wasn't it just that that had escaped him? Hipparchia was, there was no further reasoning, simply Hipparchia who had died regretting that choice, who had returned simply to claim "Shoes the Asiatics wear," and "the myrrh-scented diadem." Who had come seizing upon him for some odd reason, out of the crowd not all unworthy, critics, tragedians, naturalists in the new popular style, actors, courtiers even, many soldiers who gathered at such open palaces as that of his rich brother-in-law and his gold and black Olivia. Why hadn't Olivia even warned him? That Hipparchia wasn't Hipparchia. The girl Hipparchia who had the dour Crates for a father. Why hadn't Olivia told him, as was most obvious, that Hipparchia was simply that lost Hipparchia who took "the beggars stick", "the cloak full thick," and the rest of the Laconian appurtenances. Phantom. Wraith.

I kept no tunic with bright gem.

Hipparchia was simply that Hipparchia. Returning to claim fresh "shoes the Asiatics wear." Involving him, of all people, with death and with illusion.

He perceived that he was gibbering between night and dawn and woke utterly. The coals in the low broad bowl of the brazier still gave out spark, ruby and dull amber. Amber recalled the mesh of straight hair that had glowed pollenwise, in the dusk of yesterday's dying afternoon. Ruby the passion, anemone and Tyrian colour that was his. Soldier above all he put foot, with no hesitation, on the heavy rug that in the last glow still gave colour as of some carpet spread at dusk beneath the seated form of young Europa. He shook, independent, campaign-wise, the wide shallow bowl of dying embers. His hands clasped the warm ball as he bent over it; he thought of the cold alabaster that was his sleeping mistress. He stood now blatantly regarding her. Hipparchia lay, in the upflung fire of the stirred ashes, stretched with tight mesh of tousled hair like some inconsiderable nymph, no goddess, hardly, now he considered her, alabaster.

Hardly, now he bent searching his outer garments, even honey-coloured marble. She was utterly and patently helpless. Hardly a woman's strength to face emotion. That was it practically. She hadn't physical passion for she had so little body to enclose it. Her arms were lying bare outside the red cover and ended in claws, a bird-angular wing structure, featherless. *With the sea-gulls to chant.* His fancies even in the grey morning overpowered him. Again he sought helpless, this time, for Euripidean choros. Somewhere bird-women, Syrens, sang on sands in some distant continent. That trivial makeshift of tragedy (he recalled it) Euripides' trite Helen. A trivial makeshift of a tragedy. But with a choros that sang out tyrannous, the cold bird-spirits that called towards Hellas, banished on a foreign continent.

He walked, simple, campaign-wise toward the doorway leading to the outer courtyard and the small chamber of Hipparchia's one servant. He called the old woman to attend her mistress. "Your lady, Phaenna, looks chill lying in the dawn. The embers have gone stark cold in the brazier." He thought, striding across the marble of the outer atrium, of Sergius Gaius and their promised canter. They were intending to explore before noon the walls of the outer fortification across a low compagna. Should he order Bellerophon or his grey mare to be saddled? Under the dripping branches of Hipparchia's trim olives (the tiny squared-in garden had unproportionate variety of tree, trimmed shrub, carefully spaced and tended) the flowers crept back into their wet clumps of flat leaf or of reed-like leafage. The tiny rim of the white inset marble of the fountain basin, held a floating bud that showed one lip of scarlet. He thought equally of Bellerophon his black charger, of the outer fortification, his friend Sergius Gaius, the new leather of the legion's marching boots, the tent poles that had, at last essay, proved much better than the former used at Regium, and how to bring adequately Hipparchia to her flowering.

v

Bellerophon broke under hooves, sullen and violent, a meagre outstanding cluster of winter-flowering crocus; the heady fragrance of some spice-berry reached him; the sour quagmire was evaded. The sullen grasses lay heavy, winter-soaked below them, and a line of birds in the distance gave out a melancholy and monotonous hourgh-hourgh. It was like the persistent coughing of some broken winded war horse. Memories dark, sullen like the sky above him swelled up, seeming to rise from the quagmire of the dank compagna like seething bubbles of some Sicilian's cauldron. This was the straight way to jibbering. Marius had so far, the last six months, jibbered somewhat beyond his wonted habit. He allowed so much for jibbering. He had exceeded measure.

Sergius called to him. "The outer barrier needs remortaring." Bellerophon, urged upward, breathed foam and curling mist upon the sweating flanks of Gaius Sergius' Atalanta. The two horses curvetting, found foot-hold on the narrow shelf of the embankment of the city's outer barrage. Sergius raised his elbow, wound in its dark cloak, without loosening hold on the steed's taut rein. The elbow, out-triangular, was jerked again upward and a defiant back-flung gesture of his head in its dull leather cap (with its helmet-like ledge and the strap caught Mars-like) indicated the far city. Bellerophon stood silent, searching raw grasses on that stark fortress. One of Atalanta's delicate hind-heels lost foothold and a clatter of loose stones told how trivial, after all, was Rome's embankment. Gaius remarked casually "Montes sacrißimes. Roma invincit." Following his gesture toward the distant city, Marius saw it sullen under a sullen sky, the hill's outline showing, here and there, uneven and sparse scattering of low lights. He visualised the outer suburb, the various bridges; statistically he knew his Rome invincible.

Atalanta curvetting, flung forward at the delicate hint of Gaius' knees pressed inward. She raced breakneck, in exquisite condition, down the steep shingle of the outer mound and landed, like some forward flung gelding of the race-course, feet firm, head delicate, shoulders quivering, wet and with a wild fire of phosphorescent light glinting on her bright flanks. Bellerophon came after. As the heavier horse struck the loosened shingle in his mad down-plunge, Marius, for one exalted second, thought the game was over. With what a hair-breath of a swerve all would be simplified. The great beast with its heavier form, its dark weight, might so easily slide forward; the simple heave beneath would tell, in one second, of some unwonted incident. Marius' knees, his heavy thighs, unconsciously as if his very soul were lodged there, seemed waiting with some supersense for such sheer incident. For one exalted second, he thought surely on that loose shale, Bellerophon had failed him. In one exalted second, he could see the odd severance of steed from rider. A severance (he visualised it) not more fearful than that of head from body. Dour memory assailed him. The late unofficial expedition to Sardinia. Rome the insuperable. Against his face whipped the dire evening mist of the campagna. Beneath him, he knew in an agonising second, that Bellerophon had gained the soft turf, that Bellerophon was, like Rome, invincible.

"The dowdy creature's manner is insufferable." (They spoke of Nobilia Aemilia, the pro-consul Varian's widow). Sergius beside him, like Mars on some rough roadway, scarcely seemed to swerve as his Atalanta rocked him, cradling, comforting like some ship at anchor. Were they there static and at anchor in the dark plain? No whit of the landscape

seemed for so many hoof-beats to have altered. Stones that he had thought, measuring them by the swift progression of his thoughts, to have been left in their mad canter hours ago, stood, he was certain, static, while they rode storm-tossed now (rather than soft-cradled) yet still anchored. The leather rim of his cap cut off with a dark ridge, the glowering sky above him and the down-drizzle of spring mist that seemed one with the strange unwholesome humours of the rising vapours. "Her earrings most annoy me." Marius Decius listened, profoundly astonished, to the voice of Marius Decius that came profoundly unexpected from beneath the leather visor of the cap that pressed down, down on the thought that swept swift, impalpable through the skull that seemed in some perverse enchantment to belong elsewhere. He improved the former sentence, "not half so hideous as her ears however." "Her ears?" Sergius questioned. "But they are always hidden by that mat of dyed red she affects as headgear. She thinks wigs are more fashionable than woman's mere natural appendage." "Naturally." The voice suave, cultivated, lingered on the syllables. *Roma vincit. How? How? How?* When Rome's highest matrons were so hideous.

"Can Rome live forever?" Gaius turned facing Marius. Two dark heads, alike, suitably geared in Mars-like leather. Two mounts, twin in strength, wild in felicity. Stirrups shining in the vapourous light that was cast up from the marshland they rode on. Adequately matched, Gaius Sergius and Marius the younger Decius. How inadequately. The top of Marius' skull unsuitably was elsewhere.

"The Mithradates peril is a gross exaggeration." It was unlike Marius to glower, so curious and so distant under the Mars-like visor of his helmet. Sergius himself doubted if this enforced barrack life at Rome was best suited for young Decius. He was, of late, apt in the midst of the poignant ribaldries of the officers' quarters to drop in heavy white fleshed hand the massive wine cup and to gaze outward. Windward. Seaward. It was time young Marius was on the move again. "Can Rome live forever?" It was the grossest of absurdities, sentimentalities, unlike Marius. He reiterated. "The Mithradates peril is a gross exaggeration." Bellerophon shied at a stone, unusually sym[m]etrical, lying like the slab of some lost altar, off the pathway. Marius with a trained, utterly confident and unselfconscious gesture inreined the great creature who advanced slowly, dancing sideways. The head, bent forward, was the head of some fine gladiator as yet unspoiled by Rome's corrupting favourites. Marius was strangely, in his young rose and white, unspoiled. "The Mithradates."—"Ah, you have said twice already, 'is a gross exaggeration.' But Rome's danger is patently, startlingly and desperately from within the city."

Atalanta, nose forward, took the new Flaminian gate at a slightly undignified canter. Her nose, square-set, smelt out some distant oat-bag. Marius ducked as the gate swerved inward. They strode silent in twin step toward the Pincian. It seemed lighter on this higher range than in the valley and the levels of the stretched fields. Lights flared out at intervals; a sentinel saluted by the roadway. "You were never one Marius, to take alarm at gossip mongerings, stray Carthaginians or lesser slaves within the city. How can Rome fail?" Marius said, "Carthage, a race of traders, has been easily overborne by Rome's discipline. Trade and the sea. Galleys and the counting-house. We fought our centuries against traders. And were not defeated. We fight, fighting Greeks, some supernatural Spirit." Was this how things happened? That sly pale servant. Or was she some better born hetaira? A Greek he recalled. Gossip had, for the most part, stated frigid. Marius had perhaps reason for his preference.

Sergius said, "that Pontine marsh-fever never quite escapes one. It is a deadly peril. Lucullus tells me there is yet another remedy. A bark or root (was it?) or some Indian seed-pod; I forget which. But ground, mixed with boiling red wine, quaffed preferably in the tepidarium and digested lying. Wrapped in wool, blankets, sheltered and comfortable. It leaves a strange buzzing in the ears and sometimes headache. But lifts the humour of the invidious fever."

VI

Marius felt he had borne Hipparchia, she had left his body, honey-coloured hyacinth, dire fosterling. He was delivered of her. So he felt facing Lucullus' gold and black Olivia. Olivia had said simply, "Lucullus and I—you know—" (with a shrug of sleek, draped shoulders). "He's prece[e]ded the praetors into Spain. He says for a slight change, a rest, an interval to think over the next procedure in this overrated Mithradatean affair. Lucullus rather bores me. For myself, frankly, I have never cared more than three months for any one man." Facing this woman whom he had for some years met casually at her own villa and at the rather boisterous though none the less distinguished gatherings of the palace of Lucullus here on the Esquiline, he knew in one second of security that he had never seen her. He had not really been in the mood then for the black and gold of Lucullus' or of any man's tyrannical and overbearing mistress. He had from his youth prided himself (had he not become a sort of censor of the highest, the very most exquisite of the girls, fresh landed from the colonies, from Greece, or of the mere home product) on a special *gout*, a sort of superior relish for only the most out of the way, the most fragile and the most skilled intellectually. In Hipparchia he had run finally aground.

He felt so, lifted of her. As if in a night, a moment, a black tide had risen and lifted him, small, brightly decked but sturdy and efficient Roman galley from some Grecian islet. A small and exquisite place of wild birds, of wild sweet low-growing pulse and wind-flower. Of tiny insheltered rock and crevices deep with hyacinth, the blue that matched the blue outlying of deep waters and the yellow, the honey-yellow of what he called (and now facing black and gold, he felt finally had called rightly) the death-hyacinth. Something unforeseen had happened. Firmly declining Sergius' urgent plea to step within the quarter and gain sustenance from the long day's toil in the campagna, he had swung his bridle to the barrack servant and announced simply, "the garrison orders were to be left at Lucullus' palace. I'll go now for them." Lucullus, Sergius knew had preceded the praetorians by some three days' march into Spain. Yet he thought somewhat poorly of Marius who must thus hasten matters; let well alone anyway for some hours at least. Did Marius, he wondered, hope, by thus precipitating affairs, for the preference to the move eastward? He himself ached to follow the already tentative legions after wily Mithradates. Marius, Sergius thought blandly, recalling that white face, that curious lapse of interest in their professional circuit of the marshes, that lackadaisical expression when he said, "can Rome live forever," had actually the inward seeping virus of the marsh-sickness that took time to spread but sought usually for victim the most luxurious, the most unseemly victims. Marius' colour, though showing grey in the ghosts of the campagna vapours, was still rose and white enough to appease any mere official searching the row of well born young Romans for the preference. Straight, rather too broad of shoulder, with fetching swagger to his cloak, a casual yet perfect knot and swing to his belt strap, a well-bred tilt to his helmet and a laugh that would drown any other's hopes for favouritism, Marius (Gaius recognised gratefully) still lacked something. The final and the vital something that must prove to any sheer barbaric horde, to any of the unpretentious Greek cities or the wily, intuitive Eastern potentate that Rome was invincible. Searching Marius' eyes, he, Gaius, saw a doubt, a wavering, a search and a withdrawal that would not prove in his favour, for the preferment. It was, he finally concluded as his servant tugged at the heavy leather of his marsh-soaked and mud-spattered riding-boot, a pity that poor Marius was so stricken. The marsh-fever, once having touched man's marrow, will never utterly release him.

Marius was lifted, facing Olivia, of a dark hulk (himself) stranded, beached on a fragile, difficult and cruel islet. "Hipparchia grows more listless." Following, it would seem, his own thought, Olivia was speaking. "She cares too little nowadays for appearance." He saw now

Hipparchia with the dark eyes of Olivia. He saw for perhaps the first time since that meeting in this very house, some six months previous, the form, the saffron-clothed figure as another might have seen it. He saw, as if a great incurving tide had lifted him and the hulk of himself from some cruel outjagged point of rocky islet, the very face, the very line and fine-drawn feature, the various shifting change of line as Hipparchia smiled, as Hipparchia grew wistful. Through Olivia's dark eyes, he saw and still with tolerant serenity, Hipparchia.

Olivia spoke kindly. "What is the matter with her?" She awaited some revelation, some detail of a relationship she herself had been the first to judge strained in some manner and unnatural. "Get her to go about. See people." Olivia spoke kindly. "What is the matter with her?" "Sometimes I think she's homesick." "Homesick for what? For some lost continent? What Greek in Rome has ever yet been homesick?" Marius considered the black head with its sleek hair so suavely and so tightly brushed up from the low forehead, the eyes lifted poignantly at the corners, the chin, a little soft in modelling, not distinguished yet with the careful and well turned back-brushing of the dark hair, forming a good oval, not full yet giving a look of softness for all its stark and sleek inflexibility. The earrings were enormous and of pure cut emerald. They hung forward minimizing the slight tendency of the feature's significance. Framed with that stark and beautiful straight line of green, Olivia's face seemed set suitably. The hair was brushed with such inviolate perfection. He thought of that bird-down of inconsiderable pollen-dust, the wisps, the least conscionable of Hipparchia's beauties. Dark hair had not so far appealed to him. Marius from the first had been wont to seek the strange, the spiritualized, the slightly bizarre. In one stark second, he saw, for the first time, his taste coinciding with the general barrack preference. He felt lifted, lighted, something like a gracious tide engulfed him. He became one, almost in a second, with barrack jest, with common opinion, common feeling. So feeling himself engulfed with a dark tide, deep and impersonal, he kissed the hand outstretched (as he stood) to bid him [g]odspeed. Bending over the hand that the enormous bracelet flattered into false semblance of fragility, he wondered for one stark second that he had ever thought Olivia common and inconsiderable, a peasant (rankly almost) a Sicilian. He wondered that he had for one second questioned Lucullus' (as he thought) too obvious taste, in giving for so long special preference to this rather undistinguished girl from Sicily. He saw first that Olivia was not undistinguished. He saw next that he himself had been headstrong, misguided, anxious to claim for himself some reputation for taste, exquisite beyond the ordinary, in his prolonged and desperate affection for Hipparchia. The dark head bent back. He saw in the back bend of that head, simply a head, a woman's head, not too

precious, not too exquisite in line and modelling, simply to be considered *as* a woman's head. That simply. To look at Olivia gave him spiritual release. She was so simply, so whole-heartedly a woman.

Olivia wondered at the exalted light in the wide-spaced eyes of Marius Decius. She had not thought of him as problematically a lover. She saw now a charm, presaging further physical allure. She smiled. He rejoiced in the obvious contour that as she smiled left the general impression of the face the same, exactly the same in line and structure. He was still considering a woman. He knew with each change of expression, with each change of dress and attitude he would still be considering a woman, the same woman, not a line (searing the soul, inflaming the spirit, scarring the mentality, daring and finally proving Rome's own nothingness) of odd honey-coloured, precise, archaistic statues.

VII

Hipparchia changed, facing him. The wisps of light (the scattered pollen-dusted hair) were carefully enclosed in a snug fillet. The ears were left free, showing between careful opening of the hair mesh, fine, small, close-set against the head. The throat rose thin. The saffron cloth of the square drapery opened in a deft triangle at the throat hollow. At the triangulated opening of the cloth, the two fine ridges left a dark shadow as if an amethyst were hanging.

But facing, she changed from alert, still intellectuality. She became a creature of swift waters, unbalanced in waywardness, a demi-goddess if that, certainly no major deity. The soft saffron of her underdress showed like light lying on marble, sun-light in a pool inset on some marble floor from which bird beak would dip, and bird throat would lift and from which the very scattering of drops from that bird's frail pointed bill would cause the most distant, the most remote of music. The most ethereal echoing as of some Hamadryad half merged with its tree, struck tentative notes from some harp caught from a straying poet or wandering daughter of Apollo. Music. The Muse. Which? Was she, if a Muse, capable of expression? Was she simply, put it to the final test, some wayward voice personified?

He had not risen as was usual, urging her toward the grape-red cushioned divan. He wanted to watch, to catch her now, as one catches some fish, colourating itself to suit the reed it swims in, suddenly from the shelter of its element, and lures it with murderous intent to daylight. He wanted, watching Hipparchia, to cause her finally and distinctly to commit herself, to commit herself (was it?) finally to his enchantment. He felt watching her, that he was pitted in some desperate contest. He became as suddenly and as inexplicably indifferent.

He saw (while the old woman, Hipparchia's servant, moved with precise reverent gesture, the low table from the further corner, spread it with napery, linen, beaten silver, goblet, flat bowl, and heavier dishes) Hipparchia with the dark eyes of Olivia. "She cares so little nowadays for appearance." Nowadays? Had she ever, he wondered, cared. He said "Hipparchia. Isn't that crocus-yellow, you so constantly affect, trying sometimes in the daylight." Her eyes narrowed. She opened them on an instant. With a flash of intuition, she divined his criticism. She parried. "Who, Marius, have you been visiting?" He said, "the usual barrack crowd. I passed Lucullus' place this evening and saw Olivia." She said, "and how is Olive?" He answered, "Olivia appeared singularly beautiful." She said "Beautiful—Olivia?" He answered, "Lucullus (and others) found her so before me." She said, "and more will, after."

He noted, as she rose, that her gown was, to put it frankly, dowdy. The square as it dipped from the too thin shoulders, sagged somewhat toward the waist line. The shoulder blades protruded ever so slightly, making a little lift in the thin cloth as she turned re-arranging silver and wrought bowls upon the table. Her hips were, even in that saffron he had begun to criticise, exquisite, that is if regarded *through* the saffron as he had been so far wont to regard them. He appraised her figure now as Olivia might have done. The cloth was not wound tight enough across the thighs for perfect elegance. She wore no bracelets. She disaffected earrings. She was simple, true. She was wise, kind, exquisitely voiced, sincere, an intellectual, almost in her least gesture a being. She was, he regarded her, an idea, an obsession. He came back to his first conclusion. Hipparchia was no woman but a phantom. He reconsidered. No, not a phantom. She wasn't a phantom any more. She was the daughter simply of a dour old gentleman, of a certain provincial reputation, Crates the cynic, and of his beautiful wife, the Greek Hipparchia, who, taken all in all had behaved in a manner, to say the least, outré. He saw absolutely and finally her parents in Hipparchia. He saw the exquisite intellectuality gone dour, heavy. He saw Hipparchia as he considered her, now placing the low bowl with its gold blooms upon the table, as reaching forward, hungry, thwarted, eager, twisting her fine eyebrows over some hard saying of the Stoics. He saw her eager, profound in her hunt for poetry, her search through[t] battered manuscripts. He saw in her, in a second, the dour gentleman of the provincial reputation. He saw also fair Hipparchia of the poem who had left her high dowry of birth and of position to follow—what? A dour philosopher (or was it an idea?) into the grey wilderness of unchartered mystical experience. He saw Hipparchia as a fashionable woman's daughter gone unfashionable.

Hipparchia said, setting the wine cup down on the flat surface of the cleared table, "Olivia is a genius." Marius lifted a specially chosen grape bunch, merging intermediate in colour between the red grape and the heavy purple, turned it as he might a wine cup with odd circular motion, regarded it, replaced it for a smaller yellow cluster. He ate the yellow honey-coloured berries in a singularly suave and graceful manner, picking them one by one with small teeth from the grape stalk, like some young animal loosened in a sun-filled vineyard, intent upon its business, suave, imperturbable. She repeated, "Olivia has a very Medusa-brain for business." He answered, "Olivia, I had thought it evident, has no brain for anything." She answered, "ah, one thing."

She rose, again lifted the bowl of gold blooms and replaced it in the centre of the square, beautifully proportioned low ceilinged little chamber. She shook the alabaster bowl that held, floating in sweet oil, wick for burning. She herself, nerve-shattered yet still controlled, with angular (awkward-seeming) yet curiously gracious movement, replaced a fresh wick in a lamp already faltering. She waited for him to make his usual comment, "we'll need no more light." He did not make it.

She said singularly, "I'm cold, Marius." He drew closer, sat, knees separated, his heavy bare hand at rest upon one thigh, like some young commander, quiet, indifferent, who attends the order for a death plunge. She drew the heavy shawl with self-conscious, nervous gesture across shoulders that seemed under the inscrutable glare of the man opposite, to be suddenly uncovered and not beautiful. She saw in the very angle of the head bent forward a new sort of judge, casual, profoundly indifferent. She saw herself, under that bold and indifferent fixity, as a field swept of its flowers, bare under arid sun-light. Bare, exposed with no beauty to warrant such exposure. She said again, "I still maintain Olivia is not beautiful."

He said, "since when have you set yourself up as arbiter of Olivia's beauty?" She said, "since this moment." He said, "why now, is that so necessary?" She answered, "because I have a hundred times told you, Marius, that I was not worth keeping." He said, "ah, in your singular search for Attic verities, was it not, at last estimate a hundred and fifty times?" She said, "I think we counted it two over." "A hundred and, fifty-two then," he worried her. She faced a cold and diabolic Decius.

This indifference had come to him suddenly. But had his love for her not overpowered him as swiftly? He had thought there was no end, could never be to his enchantment. He realized now the simplicity of his nature nor marvelled any longer that the barracks found him foolish. He saw with common sight, felt with common feeling, entered some common realm of consciousness. And it had been simply the back-tilt of a woman's head that had done this for him. The tilt back of the head

of dark Olivia that as he regarded it had been simply the obvious gesture of a calculating woman. A black tide had engulfed him, lifted him, drawn up and about him, so that he, firm Roman galley had been lifted from the cruel out-jet of the rock coast of an insignificant Aegean isle, which waiting, stranded, he had seen fit to imagine for some six months, was the end, the haven, absolute firm rock, destroying ambition or desire for further voyagings, for further search into tropic, more exotic waters. He said, "if you're ill, I'll look out your philosopher medicus friend, get old Gratus to attend you." She said, "I am ill." He said, calmly with unflattering diabolic intent, "you look ill, certainly."

The heavy purple of the dark shawl she had with precise and carefully calculated pathos drawn about her thin chest, seemed in a moment to enclose another creature. That was it with Hipparchia. Again he hated her. Again his mind reached back (as a man drowning, to some ship's spar) to that gesture that this afternoon had been to him a perfect revelation. A revelation of the peace of the nonentity. Olivia was Olivia. She would be, in any shawl, in any gown, in any room, in any company, one person, and no being. She would be simply Olivia. A peasant girl, some said. Some the daughter of a prosperous Sicilian merchant. None believed the story she herself tried to circulate of some illegitimate connection of the court at Syracuse. Olivia was just Olivia. Hipparchia was not, or hardly ever, just Hipparchia.

Hipparchia seemed in the shadows of the flickering lamps, blurred, heavy, apathetic now, with a sort of insensitivity, Marius had not thought to see in her. Was she after all, a creature entirely of his imagining? Had he valued her for something that all the time was not? He began again the old tiresome and boring circle. The web and web and web that was the illusion of Hipparchia. He said suddenly for, that he could see, no reason, "Hipparchia is no Pallas but Arachne." She said in a voice, so clear, so sweet, so calm and so indifferent that he was startled again to a strange questioning; a strange doubt crossed the wide vacant eyes. The look that, Sergius had recognised blithely would finally undo him. The look that, in a second, Hipparchia was quick to recognise. With a clear sweetness of over-emphasis, she said casually, "her body, I have heard, is exquisite."

VIII

If he had loved Hipparchia before, he loved her now doubly. Was she not saving him from just the commonplace that, this very afternoon, had lifted him, a dark, gracious tide (as he had thought) from some Greek headland? What indeed had all Rome more to offer him? He bent in stark contemplative fervour his wide staring eyes upon the face beneath him. Stark, intense, honey-coloured, fragrant. He breathed in some relic of a vanished and a vanquished loveliness. A vanished

and a vanquished body of reality. Vanquished. Rome the invincible. He felt, withdrawing from her, in one moment, the overpowering beauty of this conquest.

The body was small, slight. Yet elongated. Seeming beneath his heavy muscular, yet white and rounded arms, to disappear altogether. Ah, this again was fate of desperate Helios. Beneath arms of fire, god had felt loosen (vanish, gradually but as irrevocably as a snow-drift in the late spring) the body of his fantasy. So Marius dared for one moment to consider himself; god if you will. What god yet worthy consideration had found in any mortal, satisfaction? His arms drew closer. Tight as the bark enclosing the lost Laurel. He felt diminished in vitality. Hipparchia turned breathing from parted lips, fine yet inadequately coloured, frail rose-coral, the simple, "ah, ah, ah." He saw again, in a moment a lost city. *Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines?*

It was a sigh, profound, but a sigh, irrevocably of the spirit. It was not the stark agonizing physical appeal for pity that must prove Rome conqueror.

Again she drew away as was the custom with her. She turned as a child from some elder's too suffocating embraces. She lay face downward in the dull red pillow. Her small head with its pathetic wisps, loosened from the gold fillet, was the head of some vanquished Niobid. She seemed a child beside him. Had they names, the daughters, the sons of Niobe? One of them patently was called Hipparchia. Marius seemed in a second, in some cruel fantasy, the very god now who had taken vengeance on a mortal; god, who had slain the Niobids. Seven and seven, was it? Was one of them not called Hipparchia?

Hipparchia? Slain, boy and girl alike as she turned. As she turned another Hipparchia was evident; as she lay with the thin arm above her head, she was another victim of the sun-god. A second, slain by the god's darting arrows. This time with the mouth caught inward by firm line of white teeth, it was a boy, stricken in adolescence. It was a boy's formless frail length that offered itself to his victorious, victimising consideration. As she stretched straight beneath the wine-red cloth, the body seemed inconscionably lengthened. Hipparchius slain by Helios.

Again she turned. He regarded her with renewed curiosity. Was she, as was the apparently unconscious yet diabolic tantalizing method of her, about to run the gamut of those children of proud Niobe? Was she patently beneath his eyes to become sister to herself and brother and changing and interchanging brother, sister, ringing the changes, the interrelations of fourteen distinct and separated entities? He could well see her at it. Fixedly he stared. Considering. Baffling him at his moment of enlightenment, she became simply a weary mistress, seated, yawning with slight hand raised, pressed

to stifle the heavy yawn's outbreathing, a heavy, weary sighing, with eyes wrinkled tight shut with this yawn's escaping boredom.

Olivia said, "I thought you had forgot the papers purposely."

He answered, "no Olivia. I searched, reaching the barracks early in the morning, and thought I had mislaid them. I recalled then the instant of departure, by some trick of memory you had said: 'I'll leave the orders here by the wine bowl. See that you don't forget them!' I did forget them. I forgot them utterly till the moment Publius asked; it was this afternoon after the cavalry wing practice. I left the manoeuvres for your villa." Olivia said with a backward gesture of her dark head, "they are there still."

Marius crossed the chamber. On the carved inlaid table by the outbulging obese side of the heavy wine bowl with its quaint rim of embracing Satyrs, he found the official document. "Was it quite wise of you to leave it there for any visitor?" She turned her head with a guarded movement and the face with its glance, too simply direct to be, from Olivia, quite convincing, met his stark curious eyes. "But who, Marius, ever comes here?" He said, "I don't ask, Olivia." She said, "why even consider that any should have cause for asking?" He said, "others perhaps need not. I do not know Olivia."

He was standing with the roll, a statue in the manner of the new Capitoline generals, fashionable, with his cloak slung with that attractive gesture over his left shoulder. Olivia was draped in the new scarlet. A gold fringe drew forward the cloth from the right shoulder. The gold caught in the double girdle, flowed beneath it in a clear metallic ripple to the skirt hem. Her small sandals were encrusted with cornelian. She said, standing by the bright table, "how is Hipparchia?"

He answered, "Hipparchia?" as if he had never heard that curious conjunction of rare syllables. He said then, with a change in his inflexion, "Oh, Hipparchia." He saw Hipparchia with the eyes of dark Olivia. A fashionable woman's daughter gone unfashionable. He saw moreover a vision, a wraith, a phantom, a series of visions, of wraiths, of phantoms. One of which singularly detached itself (underlip caught inward by a firm line of white teeth) and for a moment challenged the vulgarity of the new shade of scarlet, of the ornate inlaid jade and lapis of the heavy table, of the bulging bowl with its quaint rim of embracing Satyrs, of the gold fringe that pulled forward the new scarlet from a shoulder that was for all its sparcity of firm texture, adequate to hold up, like some porphery column, that vivid drapery, of the very floor he stood on, which in that momentary fraction of a second's hesitation, he regarded, to find it pictured mosaic of the most ornate and elegant pattern; grape and vine presser and small cupid alert and violent. He saw a rounded cupid on the floor he stood on, who with fat uplifted

forearm proffered a goblet three sizes too large for his proper handling. Wine dripped out, done naturalistically, with the coloured inset marbles, and a cock in full and carefully patterned plumage fought another Amor ever too small adequately to oppose him. He saw, as far and far and far, entangled with a web of faint illusion, a straight body, under a single vivid garment, a wraith, a phantom, one risen from the very realms of Acheron, to defeat him. He said, "Hipparchia may be going on to Capua. The heavy vapours of our Rome do not suit her."

Olivia said, turning with exquisite gesture, "is this treason to Hipparchia?" He wondered, considering her stark beauty, why she asked this. He said, "treason is a heavy word, Olivia. Hardly applicable to lovers." She said, "the child worries me." She assumed the professional, protective attitude, "I do not hate her." He said, drawing away, watching Olivia, "nor I, Olivia."

He did not trust Olivia. Rome, dark browed, faced Rome with equal candour. With wide eyes they regarded one another and in their static and exact speech they questioned and they answered. Each knew the other perfectly versed in this common practice of speaking one way and of thinking other. Each could follow each. As two versed, equally matched in some simple popular game of skill. There was no *arrière pensée*. Simply a simple knowledge that all she said was falsehood. So realizing this, he could himself speak exactly, click the exact counter, check her in brazen essay to penetrate his armour.

Nevertheless he caught with small white teeth a mouth that lifted up to him was a veritable cluster of red grapes ripening on a hot wall. With small teeth, like some small animal loosened in a sun-steeped, guarded vineyard he sought the porphery that under the worrying of those tentative, snarling, little bites proved no marble but flesh, hardened, muscular, intense and virile in its immediate resistance. Olivia with professional, skilled gesture drew him onward. Till following (small animal, in a sun-steeped vineyard) all of his thwarted hunger, he could straighten, regard a dark supple image, stretched dark and supple and fragrant with spice and carnation and with some odd unfamiliar over-powering perfume, heady and violent yet remotely reminiscent of distant pine forests and remark, "Olivia is satisfied?"

She answered him, exquisitely, with exquisite flattery and with a glance wherein the dark shade as of a soft and vivid poppy-heart seemed to make of eyes and dark lids and the hollow underneath the lids, one soft shadow, as if the very dark heart of a poppy had been dusted there, "you alone, Marius, so far have ever done so." He straightened, looked, smiling, cynical at her. He felt adequately commonplace, adequately satisfied. The soul merging with the body was stilled in its curious clamour. His lapse was physical, a physical merging so perfect

that he felt indeed somehow sheltered, somehow the very lost-child of this woman. Dark, with a fragrance as of distant pine-trees. Beneath the obvious porphery and the obvious fashionable exterior, he had unexpectedly found a sweep of fragrant pine-trees. Cones, heavy with their strange wood texture, needles, a carpet beneath the tall outstretched woman figure. The heady exuding resin itself in that dark hair. The very form and substance of a dark pine. This surprised him.

Rousing herself feebly, with all the languorous professional appeal, she said simply. "clap twice, Marius," and as he did so, almost as if her orders, the whole thing, had been pre-arranged, anticipated, two girls entered, one bearing a bowl of spiced wine, the other a heavy grape-leaf covered platter. On the dew-wet fresh vine leaves lay small white cheese, the peeled ivory of various hazel, pine and walnuts, brown-baked wheat and white-meal cakes, small plums, figs and broken pomegranates.

IX

Hipparchia said "how kind of Marius." Regarding her, his face indrawn, sullen in its masque, he wondered, for the thousandth time, how simple or how diabolically subtle this girl was. Anyhow she had been no fit companion for him. Over and over and over the thought returned, that he, Marius Decius had been under some spell, some quaint spell, something called up from that, dark underworld where flowers bloom most poignant (honey-gold, wax-white) in scent and texture. Death hyacinth. She had been, would be that always. Seated, with his cloak still wrapped about him, he continued, "I tried to get you yesterday. The orders, somewhat unexpected, found me unnecessarily crowded. The two horses. Bellerophon needed an entire outfit. The mare I had entirely neglected. Finally I found a market for her. Gaius himself fancied her rather unusual colour. His new bridles, the copper and dull gold, he thought would suit her better even than my old-fashioned Cretan silver. The mare is well placed. There was the business of the tents. I had neglected these things overmuch and the whole distracting matter of the notes to be arranged, the writing itself is fatiguing but private affairs cannot be entrusted to a servant. Verrus leaves immediately. I attend for some weeks longer at the barracks. But with such a rush and business of preparation, I will have little time to see you. Verrus, by just that trick of fortune that usually saves one in emergency, met me only yesterday, the very hour when I should have seen you. He simply put it this way. 'The girl is ill; something is undermining her sanity, Decius, apprehensions and tremours, nervousness. This prolonged exile in Rome means, for her, immediate danger.' My dear Hipparchia. I had not thought your moods, your tremours, dangerous. You were always oversensitive, high-strung. But Verrus' train of horses,

the heavy household matters, I believe have already reached the villa. He suggests you leave to-morrow, next day, within two days anyhow, for Capua."

She repeated again quietly with no change of inflexion, "how kind of Marius." She stood as if expecting his departure. She said, standing, "I will see that the parcels, the manuscripts of the poets you fancied, the rolls of unfinished history of the Macedonian conquest, the various little things you gave me, (things really unsuited to me) be sent to you." He stood facing her, "hardly. This camp[i]gning leaves no room for trifles." She regarded the face indrawn, sullen. She remembered nothing. But miraculously a wave of some sort of release, a wave of detachment, something from the outside overcame her. She said, "no, Marius. No, no. I see that." She spoke swiftly, lighted, as if exactly to spare him, so likely it seemed that he was about to make some blunder. It was unfortunate for her that she could see so clearly. Almost as she faced him, it seemed, she was gazing into some enchanter's mirror. The very form, the garment Olivia must have then worn, the room she slept in. Marius was stupid. He had so overdone it.

X

When Verrus touched her gently and said, "You are not tired, Hipparchia?" she said, "No Verrus." *I cast my lot with cynics, not* was running through her head. She had apprehended poetry physically as she had never apprehended loving—*with women seated at the distaff*. The metre beat and beat rhythmic and undeniable hypnotic refrain in her tired body. *With cynics not—gem—diadem*. She recalled the rhythms she had repeated this very morning jolting in the elegant waggon Verrus had sent to Capua to meet her. Relaxed in the elegant chariot, she had sunk against an inner lining of fitted dove-down cushions, on mole-lined blankets, Syrian sheep-skin, as now she was resting in soft fleeces beside Verrus. With *I kept no tunic with bright gem* an iterated refrain. But more than ever she repudiated her mother and her mother's intellectual decision. *With cynics, not*—"No, Verrus."

Outside a singular subtle recurring rhythm beat singular and hypnotizing antistrophe to the eternal rhythm in her bound head. A band was tied about her bared skull, a band of curious nervous inhibition. It was there, had been there from the beginning, from the moment when Marius had bent and in a wholly cautious un-lover-like gesture had kissed her forehead. Her forehead had been cold (she knew) to the cautious kiss of Marius. But inside, like bubbling wine in a chaste goblet, there had been another order of refined and sensuous imagining. The colder the outside of her bared and naked skull, the more indifferent her thought, her attitude, her consistently detached and abstract approval of this final need of Marius, the more subtly

dangerous, the more domineering the bubbling fire within. That fire within was kept in check (as the outside naked skull, the goblet, grew more frigid) by a band (she could visualize it) that wound round and grew more straightly binding.

When Verrus touched her and said gently, "you are not tired," she said, "no Verrus," for outside a singular prolonged and exquisite murmuring told that sea-level was being reached by that low almost tideless inner ocean. Sea level, high-water mark of intellectual achievement had been reached by Hipparchia her mother, who *kept no tunic with bright gem*. The tide must retreat once high-water mark is reached. The mind developed beyond normal, developed and tyrannized, must again flow back and back or else a string bound tight about a frozen skull will, by just one minute hair-breadth of a tightening, cut through; cut (she visualized it) a skull neatly like a thread dividing a round cheese or ripened melon. Her head was about to be split like some ripe fruit overweighted on its trellis.

Then she was surprised simply. "Hipparchia who knows everything so cleverly, so patently knows nothing." Her body communicated so to speak with her stark and blinded head which, in a moment (she noted) was no longer bound straightly with a tight cord that, for one minute fraction of a hair's breadth tightening, would cut clean through as a taut thread cuts a Cydonian sun-ripened melon. The Cydonian melon and the stark frozen goblet were in analogy opposite but both terms had served to crystallize for her own consideration, her mental state, her curious affliction. Hipparchia noted with a faint shiver of astonishment that she was not altogether "heartless". From far and far and far surrounded with a web of faint illusion, she recalled words that had no specific correlation with this present but that rose from far and far as if the very goblet, that frozen skull, she thought of, had spilt over. Words that had no correspondence with the actual occasion, became visible almost. Became bright and fluid now that they passed beyond her into a world of disenchantment. The world they passed to was a world of nothing. "Hipparchia who knows everything so cleverly, so patently knows nothing." Her surprise was tempered with a mild astonishment. It was Verrus speaking. "But you do not give yourself—to—me—Person".

"Giving" and "not giving" became, in a moment, realizable terms to be exactly apprehended. She had not it appeared "given" to Verrus and the occasion was darkened for the same reason that a tight band had wound about her temples, a sanctified but sacrificial fillet that, as it wound the tighter had made her the more the god's priestess yet victimized. She was no more that. She was no longer victimized. But words from near (from far) were correlated in her mind. "Hipparchia who knows everything so cleverly—" She did now know. Because of Verrus and his suave renewal. In spite of Marius' "Hipparchia knows nothing."

But that in a moment was repudiated. It was again Verrus speaking. "Things are different with a person of one's own—standing." In that suave and elegant chamber of her bridal her soul was satisfied. Verrus was not comparing her to the frenzied rose-radiant women of the Aventine. He had for her, another scale of judgment. Verrus, it appeared, had realized another being and another scale of etherialized emotion. He spoke, though she hardly heard his utterance, something far and far— "when all these Mithradatean blusterings are over— Capua—the villa—" something about Hipparchia being set, as any gem more suitably, something from far and far and far about some suave and golden Eros—"a child sometime"—and feel sleeping—down and down into some apprehended beauty, some world of suave utterance and of chaste renewal. *Couches spread in the palace of Zeus.* So Hebe removing affectedly small dainty bracelets (she thought of Hebe with small bracelets) held close her giant lover; Demeter met Zeus someway similar; Iris and some tenuous young-lord lover; Helen of Troy even; Helios—ah Helios, her mind, returning from some region of half-slumber, repudiated Helios. Daphne, a lost lover. Hyacinth. Her eyes, wide open, stared now upon the squares of neat ceiling fitted geometrically like pale honeycomb. Her eyes saw light break across the ceiling, an angle of clear light and realized that outside heavy half-drawn curtains noon of mid-night, moon rather, reached its zenith.

Her frail foot touched tentative the cold floor, moved further across a region of ice-marble, across a soft fleece (she remembered dyed red-purple) toward the further curtain. With her body hunched forward, she felt (like one blind) air, that seemed to be about to rush in upon her, very ponderous with weight of molten silver. The triangle of light she entered, it seemed, must resist her groping fingers; but no, she pushed into it. Her hand pushed into and across bright metal that was the moon-light from without in full flood through parted curtains. She staggered as one drowning toward those static curtains, fell toward them, found them too, surprisingly of another quality than her stunned brain apprehended. "Hipparchia who so cleverly knows everything." Her honour was repudiated. Her beauty was re-sanctified. Her holiness was accorded her. She was no longer a stray, a waif wandering, a stranger, in heavy sodden cities. "Romans are wine-pressers, Marius." She was no longer a waif, an outcast, one of the dispersed civilization of the islands, this tribe that penetrated Rome's solid body like (some said) maggots in fine oak-wood. Maggots in a towering massive structure, an oak, Dodona-like that reached toward heaven but that held earth trated the fine garden that was Hellas, breaking loam where Cythnian lilies had for long clustered and great-eyed maiden daisies held supremacy. Rome was a great oak tree with no Dodonian prophecies. Rome had no prophets and no prophesying. "Since when Marius has one been able to

escape the dead?" Never, never, never with the Mediterranean glamour to weld old beauty with new beauty, things imperishable with things never perished. Her hand clutched at a heavy fold of woven stuff that gave unbelievably under her lighted fingers. The curtain was woven stuff though her brain (so strangely lifted) had conceived it to be hung, heavy porphery. The curtains were soft beneath fingers so lighted that the very moon-light had seemed silver; heavy molten metal, it appeared, must meet fingers that were so etherialized that light seemed matter.

Her body recalled her to herself. It was cold by curtains parted onto an open space of columns that led in geometric par[a]llels toward the outer darkness. An outer darkness of low shrubs, small hedges of trimmed saplings, small trimmed bush and thicket of wild laurel. Hipparchia thought swiftly, suddenly in frenzy, "is Helios justified?" Helios, indifferent god with bright arrows; like Eros with bright arrows and yet mateless. The moon rounded the laurel grove. The portico of Verrus' villa was Greek and it met Roman laurel. Roman laurel—there was no such thing—laurel was always Greek. Hipparchia felt confused, numbed, cold, frightened, in a sudden frenzy. Apprehension for some reason smothered her. The white silver beat down to shut her, tomb-like, in some Egyptian coffin. She felt caught, paralysed; Hipparchia knew now love but was she caught now in it? She dropped a curtain that had grown, it appeared, porphery again in weight and resought Verrus. It was she who said (again with very words that recalled Marius) "comfort me Verrus."

He lay, arm stretched above a fine featured but heavy forehead. Verrus was sleeping. She turned face down, as she was wont to do and pondered. It was apparent that some Aphrodite had recalled her, called her to the realm of womenkind. In spite of an ice-ringed but no more threatened skull that still told her she was servant of Athene. Some Aphrodite had summoned her to "couches spread in the palace of Zeus." She came back to Euripidean choros. Euripidean choros seemed to fit simply her surroundings, part simply of the landscape as that gentle, subtle lap-lap of the almost tideless ocean that beat a measure so fine, so subtle, so etherialized that one could scarcely count it. Euripidean choros was perfected subtle breath of metre as the man beside her had perfected breath of loving. There had been no striving, no lacerating clutch and plunge, such as soldiers parrying, counter-thrusting, practice at their sword-play. This was a different matter (she must apprehend it) belonging to realms of columned porches, of temples, of temple corridors and to the curious lap-lapping that strove subtly, inreaching, hardly perceptibly moving, that was the languorous yet distinctly measured, equalizing, balancing movement of the inner tideless ocean.

Verrus had loved her simply. About him, there was obvious mark of priesthood. Breath on breath. There had been no striving. So Artemis, must, she felt, have caught between long arms the form of young Endymion. Snow (in her apprehension) caught and tangled in the wisps of her pollen-dusted hair. Snow swept about, embracing her, herself molded to a snow drift. Snow permeating, penetrating, (no thrusting, counter-parrying of soldiers at the sword-play) till snow and snow were one, a new Danae with more frail god-embodiment. Pure gold was brittle, heavy. How could gold love woman? Snow (in her consideration) was all about her or was it the down sweep of scattered almond-petals? Almond petals. Hipparchia came back to actual memory letting slide transition of blurred apprehension. She came back (staring, wide-eyed) to the ceiling across which the outer light had wandered, outlining longer and more cone-like triangle toward the far distance. The dark more realizable square of actual ceiling above her (as she stared longer) obliterated apprehension, ideas for sheer actual memory. Memory in her thought was all about her. The very plaques of the floor marble she had trod on (a slight foot curling under at its sudden ice impact) were square on square of beautiful spaced flowering. Memory would serve to plant square on square of exact proportion and of colour on the floor she had last stepped on, wandering in her wraith-like and disembodied ecstasy (some hours since?) toward a silver flood that had threatened to shut down on her, to prison her, tomb-like in some Egyptian coffin. Memory would paint over apprehension, lotus-vision, with actual image. The red, fire-red, and the faint washed-in red of the sky-bow merging as in heaven with bright green. The flowers of her morning's memory should glow, bright ember, on the floor. She would, inversely, set the ceiling with them, actual memory of the rose-red, fire-red anemones of Verrus' garden as she had this morning, seen them. Could actual memory be exceeded by mere imagining? Could vision supersede sheer natural contour of flower petal? If she could ever hate Verrus for his acclaim of her she must love him for his garden. Red, fire-red, faint-red, rainbow colour. Anemones in her consideration shown, ember all about her. Embers shone about her feet. She again lost memory in vision.

*O queen,
lovely who stoop to mortal lover in the inmost house
of tall Achilles—*

Poetry must answer her (her own) but that was crude beginning.

*O queen who stoop
 to love a mortal
 yet who rise to bear
 a god,
 O house, O delicate and fair
 small house and painted for his rest,
 O hear
 Thetis O rare
 blue water holding in your heart
 bright fire,
 how did you feel, were you and god at peace?
 tell me, O cease—*

Thetis—Achilles—anemones—blue water—fire and the turmoil of a honey-coloured lightning that let dust down almond petal across some lost wraith. *Where Corinth charm incarnate are your shrines?* “Have I not been made enough to suffer for the war-lust of my ancestors?” Your citadel, your towered wall, your line of noble women and that ten thousand—and that ten thousand—and that ten thousand—of your people—lost.

XI

Anemones were over. Now, as she crept from grass island to grass island (the clumps were separated in their thick tuft from the surrounding sea of low fine verdure) her hands were filled with the spikes of early summer orchid. She explored these tufts of thick grass, minute islands, for further just unfolding blossom. The wax spikes of the rare violet spirals were closed, tight infolded toward the faint coloured tips while the whirl of tiny graduated purple heads (above the thick jade-green stem) gave poignant fragrance. Fragrance more steady, more clear and undeviating than a wavering incense that (she recalled) scattered above an altar to disperse in vague cloud against a painted ceiling. Fragrance of these spires seemed static, seemed to hover, visible almost (just not visible) like an aura of the blossom; seemed never to fail no matter how long she regarded the thin wax-taper of a flower-spike held static in her fingers. Hipparchia seated herself on a thick wind-flattened sun-steeped pad of last year's leafage, to reconsider, to form deft image, to make static image (in her mind) of this poised wax taper held in her fingers toward a just-invisible and just not-embodied Helios. Fragrance given off in that clear air, seemed altar incense and she officia[t]ing priestess.

She was happy. Life draws back from the Delphic priestess. Life, a black torrent, had drawn its dark tide away from her, away from her, away from Hipparchia who stood now a giant Thetis among islands. Grass islands made minute emerald outline of Melos, Naxos,

the minute sacred Cyclades. With half-closed eyes, blinded with summer, half drugged with the summer fragrance, she seemed (giant to tower, to outgrow earth and human possibilities, to be (in all the world) the one fated to recall the islands, to string them, thread them, irregular jagged rough-jewel on a massive necklet, no frail woman ornament, nor one to be bartered for fresh continents, but to be laid simply at an altar, she officiating to re-sanctify it. "Greece is now lost, the cities dissociated from any central ruling." Greece is now lost—the words rising from some unconscious layer of her thought, recalled humanity, pain, disillusionment. "Greece is now lost, the cities dissociated from any central ruling." Half drugged with summer and with subtle fragrance, she could recall exactly the particular encounter, and the particular moment when those words smote, prophetically (last winter?) showing the impossibility of compromise. She did not compromise. Humanity had drawn back, black sea, to leave her standing, giant Thetis, viewing the naïf and unpolluted islands.

She came back now. She stepped so to speak from her tense trance-state like a moth from a split chrysalis. She stepped so to speak from her tense mood and laid a hand become suddenly nerveless, lax across the peak (she still half visualized it) of a minute mountain. The hand sank suddenly and she recalled exactly her surroundings. The hand sank down lax, nerveless and as the cold of the fresh green spires of the inner un-sunned grasses (weeds of an inner green pool unfolded) it contracted, tense, shocked from its nervelessness to a marble quality of tension. Her hand lay, separated in her consciousness, a marble hand broken, separated. It was as if a heavy marble hand had been broken from the draped body of some exiled Muse or early unfashionable Aphrodite. An archaic hand, heavy, firm-weighted, of priceless texture, lay heavy white stone on the green floor of some tiny tide pool. Hipparchia sat so considering it. She noted that the taller grasses seemed to give off light from within, their tense green living like the serpent or like sliding sun-rays on cut emerald. Recalled entirely by the numbing chill that crept from these brilliant grass spires, she returned to actuality, to the scene about her.

She sensed with peculiar ardour the cloth that warmed her chill hand. It seemed the very colour of the dyed cloth was responsible for the subtle glow that irradiated along her upper arm where the long grass sprays had caressed it. The very cloth seemed to hold some potent vigour. Its very Tyrian colour warmed her chill hand and she seemed (white wine) to glow with some subtle instillation of pure colour. White crystal takes on colour. So she felt sensitive to every change of sky, of sea, of wind, of orchid blossom, of her very garment. This, especially suited to her, was cut with precision, arranged in pleated folds to fall exactly from below the girdle, in the manner

of her affected period. She remained fashionable now, for all her affectation. Her very garments pertained to the very-present, would (should she return to it) give her distinction in any Roman circle. The elegant Alexandrian design of Tyrian fibre fell soft yet warm about her and the square about her shoulders was fitted with a stone clasp that carried out in tone the rare tint of the sea-purple spun wool. Cloth, a garment, became to her part and symbol of her relationship with Verrus. "Isn't that crocus-yellow, you so constantly affect, trying sometimes in the daylight?" She heard the word, conscious of the becoming coral-rose on ivory that her flesh was, rose-coral that gave back rich tone yet subtle; delicate like the purple of the orchids she was still caressing. She tied the bundle of jade stems with a long grass blade, fastened them at her throat where the heavy rough-set gem reflected colour of the famous dyed wool. "—crocus-yellow trying sometimes in the day light?" Daylight in Rome was a plague that any cautious woman might well flee from. Her saffron curtain shut out Rome's light but here she needed no such intermediary veiling. She was *alive*. As she returned wholly to the world about her, she was at one with reality. With the present. She was matched physically with Quintus Verrus. Did the mind matter?

Physically complete, it seemed she might reach out, step across some separating space of material dullness, find herself (as but this moment she had almost done) face to face with Beauty. God inspires the Muse, but she wanted a direct personal inspiration. She would do away with any intermediate stylus, reach him direct, in one bound realize him. She felt priestess rather than poet, sheltered, appreciated, wholly substantiated in her being.

Her hand had warmed now against her inner vest. She needed nothing, no one, only Verrus to lay purple at her feet, to lift a goblet toward her filled with white wine, to assure her that her body was perfection. She must know that her body was perfection for down, down somewhere, small insinuating black-winged monsters strove to penetrate, to sting through her clear amethyst indifference. Small black-winged buzzings in lucid sun-light like hornets on a grape bunch. "Romans are wine-pressers. Not badly spoken; you do give us credit sometimes." She bent her head back, let sun dazzle her shut eyes, let forego this self-abasing, self-abusing torment. She had forgotten Marius. A small hawk (she was staring again wide-eyed into far space) spun round and round in intricate circle, making a design on space. Her mind hypersensitive to the point of anaesthesia, found this circle soothed her, counteracted her just realized fearful suspicion of an inimical dark world buzzing beneath her amethyst water-clear indifference. "Wine then flows from you, Greek intoxicant." But she had forgotten Marius. She had forgotten Marius. Verrus had given her a body that beat with rhythm to near sea, that belonged in timbre,

in quality to sparse emerald grasses, to separated spikes of rock orchid clustered about her, to a horizon that at full noon shone as silver setting for sliced Egyptian turquoise, to a sea heavy and level and undeviating in its remorseless, hypnotizing rhythm. Humanity, a swarm of black-winged hornets was quiet, down, down far below an orchid-amethyst layer of abstraction which was her indifference to it and her peace with Verrus. "Romans are wine-pressers." She felt lighted like the taper-shaped orchid by some curious spiritual quality from within.

Moreover Villa Capua was perfection. She was recalled to it by the aspect of one of the villa servants bent low, graceless in his unaccustomed milieu. His feet slipped, trod unbecomingly and resentfully across the rough bramble. If Hipparchia was ever criticised by Verrus' servants, it was for these aberrations, odd disjointed wanderings in full day, dawn or mid-night, outside the villa gardens. Why were paths laid so symmetrically perfect, measured by the gardener from Pergamum who had gone mad on some slight knowledge he had once picked up from an Alexandrian undergardener on curves and parallel lines, yet who made a garden that few even in Baia could compete with? Hipparchia knew but had insinuated herself in the good graces of the odd Asiatic by exemplifying the hypotenuse of the right-angled triangle with a stick for him on rough gravel. It was late then? Verrus had sent this man to call her. Verrus seldom disturbed her in her ramblings as he realised her delight in these odd headlands, her desire for exploration, her joy for self effacement among gulls and wild birds. It must be some important communication, awaiting she thought (as she stretched her hand for the roll the man reached toward her) immediate answer. But the Greek servant, with deferential gesture (the matter had evidently no immediate answer) left her.

The writing was small, exact, unlike Marius really, yet in some subtle way suggestive, bruited the scholarly affectation of the Roman soldier. The document was tied in his official colour, sealed by him.

March Ides. With the Adusian Eagles.

Ave,

It appears, my Hipparchia, that I had only to depart finally from the white porches that are your arcana, your very sheltered and secret self, adequately to find you. Olivia is marvellous. I think I disagree on final analysis. Her body is remarkable rather than exquisite, I can tell you frankly that my own has been recognised, revered for what really it is, not for what it should be or what it patently is not. I think the thing I hated most in Hipparchia was her curious sublimating quality. She thought this or so. Therefore by some witchcraft of intellectualisation, we who loved her, were forced by a sort of suggestive hypnosis to

become, in some subtle manner, somewhat of the thing, she, in her high mind, saw fit to see us. Olivia is just Olivia. With her Marius is Marius. Her body is astonishing. Her manner rivals that, I should imagine, of the most skilled even of the Dictator's choosing. She is moreover human. A thing Hipparchia is not. I think in leaving her, I felt first relief, physical escape. Then boredom of the emptiness, the final unreality of warfare. Then finally when boredom had a little cleansed the citadel that is the somewhat unreliable soul of your Marius, I felt creeping like some insinuating wrraith, or mist, the old glamour, the old insatiety, a disease, a mental unsteadiness, a thing that inexplicably lifts me out of my confining heavy members. I call it just Hipparchia.

All of which means that I adore you. I deserve to lose you. If Verrus proves as Olivia has, unsatisfying to your very inmost searching, remember there is always, will be always

Decius.

XII

Villa Capua was perfection. Moreover if she should ever hate Verrus for his acclaim of her she must love him for his garden. Two thoughts, that (she recalled accurately with her annoying precision) had come to her, one in early spring with the anemones, one in early summer with the wild purple orchids. Now in very late summer these thoughts must yet sustain her. *Villa Capua is perfection.*

Propped aloft against the cushions of the low couch, Hipparchia turned in memory to clear precise recalled appreciation. Villa Capua is perfection. *If I should ever hate Verrus for disarming me, I must love him for his garden.* Outside was a singular drone-drone of recurrent rain-drops, a heavy downpour that had been threatening them since morning. Hipparchia had dragged through a long late-summer day, in desperation engaging the head gardener in talk of Theophrastus. The gardener hung, like one of his own great winged butterflies, on her utterance. To the Pergamene gardener, at least, she was infallible. He awaited further revelation. "Our round cytissus of the islands is not precisely in its seeding like this gold one." White cytissus of their headlands differed by ever so slight a leaf-variation from the South Italian single late one. Was one descendant of the other? Odd feats were nowadays hinted at by famous naturalists. She herself spoke of the famous graft in Aristotle's garden of the Cydonian plum and apple. The gardener worshipped her. Was she some Circe or Medea, strayed wistful to their headland? For she was rather wistful now and somewhat hungry. Verrus did not care for Theophrastus. *But Villa Capua was perfection.* "Don't you think Verrus," she had intimated earlier in the

evening, "we might have the brazier in the bedroom?" Verrus had not thought so. "Braziers burning in a bed-room stifle breathing." Why had she so submitted to his slight caustic superiority? Hipparchia wished now, with rain drone-drone on the low roof above her, that she had insisted further. Demanded outright comfort. "Coal burning in the bed-room stifles breathing." She had not thought of Verrus when she asked this. She wanted for herself Tyrian glow of dying red-coal.

If there were Tyrian glow of red coal the further recess of the room would be well lighted, with a faint elusive but wholly satisfying quality, like the sun-rimmed heart of a red poppy or the red of anemones. Hipparchia wanted colour from outside to substantiate her being. Within herself she was clear enough, cold enough. She propped herself straighter and regarded darker shadows that seemed to waver with the rhythmic insistent drum-drum of the heavy rain drops. Verrus slept, inhuman and indifferent.

A brazier in the bed-room made her think of Marius. He was that to her now that he had left her. That she had left him. She visualised in retrospect, after the first rapture of the three months' insolation and the healing that late spring and early summer brought her, a Marius akin to purple windflowers. She visualized a Marius other than the one she had repudiated with her first awakening. She too had only to depart from porches that were arcana, to find him. "I had only to depart—adequately—to find you." So she. She had found a Marius other than the Marius of Olivia. Other than the one she had, in the first ecstasy of her awakening, repudiated. Sleeping beside her was the cause of revelation.

Nevertheless Villa Capua was perfection. She wanted only a sensuous outer image, the slow and sullen and beneficent glow of live coals to give reality to this cold perfection. She only wanted live coals. Was Verrus callous? No. He was constantly aware, prescient toward her. For this, she had not written Marius. Was Marius perhaps (with the Adusian eagles) dead? Why shouldn't he be? With this callous question, she shut out thought now, consciously, of Marius. We are what the gods weld us to. Across black shadows the rain beat heavier. Shadows loomed large, loomed heavier. Within the shadow Isis watched. Osiris stood hands crossed on flat chest. By day he stood there odd and sinister. The gods of Verrus' affectation loomed more odd and threatening in imagination in the shadow. Egypt in the shadow. The rain beat heavier on the roof that seemed visibly lower as rain pressed heavier on it. The roof had seemed to her early-spring obsession to be lifted skyward, lofty as some Acropolean temple. Now roof with lean rain upon it, seemed about to fall and suffocate her. The rain seemed merging with the blotting shadows. The very shadows seemed to throb, to pulse with the drum-drum of insatiate storm cloud. Rain fell now thundering, a very summer cloud break. She felt, clinging tense and fearful to the

bed frame, that the torrent must sweep this fragile, perched edifice of thin pillars and delicate roofing down into seething water. She visualized that spread sea-floor of lapis now as black and hideous. The rain persisted. Its drum-drum became the insistent, tyrannous heart-beat of some giant lover. Ugly, tyrannous, insistent. Ugly, insistent, dominant and domineering. The very marble pillars of the outer portico must snap like fragile birch trees. Hipparchia saw that marble splitting, heard it almost. A shrill wail. Was it her own voice or some distant wraith, Laurel herself, broken in the rain beat? The place was taut with wraith and fear and peril. Yet neither roaring from without nor tenuous ghost-peril could wake Verrus. For the first time, Hipparchia wanted old Phaenna. Why had she left her? Hipparchia longed for some familiar servant, old nurse-Phaenna, one who would answer should she dare shriek. She wished for human comfort, shelter from this drum-drum that now, she was certain, would unearth the shallow edifice. *Villa Capua is perfection.* She must come to it and *if I must ever hate Verrus for his acclaim of me I must love him for his garden.* She saw that garden now, thought of her friend the Pergamene. Was he sleeping? She thought not. She could visualise his concern. Was he dreaming? Was he pondering on Hipparchia, that very wise Greek woman? O, how wise, only Hipparchia well knew. But the garden. She felt dread, suicidal, she must dash outside, fall and be obliterated with the Phrygian lilies. Marius? Marius would have made festivity of disaster. Joked with her. Summoned willing slave with wine, brazier, fresh torches, made festivity for her. He would have ordered lights, brazier, wine, played older brother to her, made occasion of delight in such catastrophe. Joked with her, told her half laughing, half in seriousness, always jesting, to call on the gods she so singularly was kin to. Gods? They rose before her in memory along the wall opposite. A row of alien deities. An Owl, her very Athenian's brilliant-eyed attendant, yet how different. Bound round and round with grave clothes. Another, a seated woman, had opposed her somewhat. Done in dark metal with horns. She had asked Verrus if it was symbolic. Io after God embraced her. Verrus had smiled with that thin-lipped superiority and remarked simply, "Person thinks every possible personable god must be Hellenic." It was then she had discovered, that it was Isis of the Egyptians. Hipparchia had seen enough images of Isis, among the more fashionable of her acquaintances at Rome, to recognise this one. Isis, though, here in Elysium seemed unsuitable. Isis here in Elysium. Hipparchia found strangely that she lacked that power here in the dank, rain-hammered bedroom to sublimate, as Marius said her method was, the gods. Obviously Isis was their very Aphrodite (though this mechanical constation did not comfort her) come from some region which repudiated sunlight. Done in dark metal with a seated Eros; Horus precisely.

The owl which Verrus told her was a hawk and the centre wooden figure, grew distinct. Almost by some curious power within themselves, they he came outlined, shining with uncanny flat, bright-tinted surfaces; Osiris, Isis. The hawk—as dawn broke.

XIII

Marius was certain the gods had sent this to distress him. He was enough an ally of the old patrician nobility, though the strain ran thin, to believe this. He remembered suddenly a name, Camilla, his mother's and her curious dissimilarity to it. His father, the last of the direct race (Decius Junius, tradition stated, had been a member of that mythical Numa's following) had died jibbering some ten years since, of some unfamiliar mental malady. Lost memory and general mental wanderings. Marius believed, had always thought, there was much of his father in him. But lying, doubled, with his heavy gear pressing a death weight upon him, in the Asiatic desert, he remembered though he hated her, with gasp of appreciation, Camilla, that same full-breasted domineering woman.

He recalled Camilla and her curious combination of stern housewife and of lax moralist. Mixed in him, a double strain, he had the curious coarseness and physical exuberance of his mis-named mother and the fine sensitivity that ran, had run to seed in Junius Decius his ill-mated father. Two strains that ran alongside, each hostile to the other, as if the very bodily quarrels of his parents had taken form in him, had never ceased this warfare, which since his earliest childhood had threatened to undo him. Fine sensitive thwarted patrician outreachings: marble, Hipparchia. Heavy flesh and sensuous misdoings: porphery, Olivia.

Across his brain, across his heart, his spirit, these two weights of polished and exquisite stone seemed to bear him down, down into the sifted gold of the sun-baked, blistering inner desert, even as his heavy war-gear pressed pitiless to bury him in this baked waste of fine drifted sand. Heaving his weight aloft on one elbow, by a stern mental effort, he shook so to speak, the weight of marble and of porphery from his spirit, as he shook by a supreme effort the shield hanging from his shoulder and disentangled his shod, heavy greaved limbs from the mass of Roman and of barbaric matter, accoutrements, shields with fantastic border, cut for the inserting of dark jewels. Even as he shook the heavy gear that encumbered his weighted muscles, so he shook off this tantalising vision. Camilla, Hipparchia, Olivia. In the distance he saw the Roman eagles, battering back a flying host of most disconcerting grandeur, shields and feathers from tall chased metal helmets, arrogance bridled, horses caparisoned like the very bodies of the sons of Mithradates. Heaving masses of infantry pursued beautifully champéd

and flying horsemen who turned flying like some fantastic coloured cloud along the marked edge of the far horizon. Horse and rider appeared miraculously clear in this desert to dart bright arrow and slim, sinuous spear into the massed and darker host of Romans. Peering, straining his sun-seared eyes, he was infatuated with the very spectacle, lost sight of his condition, the battered heaps of armour that lay containing Romans, the bright detail of the foreign bodies' headgear, the broken traces of a chariot inlaid with flattened garnet, a square gold banner that still hung loose from the vermillion pole which brown hands valiantly uplifted even as the body fell headlong to lie, propped against another upturned chariot; the horrors of gore, sweat, putrid emanations that had sickened him earlier in the forenoon were forgotten. His mind singularly was erased of this extraneous matter; in a moment even of that vivid panorama that he had with this supreme effort risen to cheer onward. It faded from his strained vision, alike with the sun glint on the heaps of molten silver that fitly sepulchred the fallen heroes.

The eagles pursue Mithradates. I envy them their flight but leave them to it. myself somewhat stricken, lie watching across a purple tent-fold, a sun that all the cloth of Tyre could not, does not, modify. It beats through cloth, tent stuff, all the heaped devices to prolong night-fall. I write speaking. The man who found my charger still attends me. A half Greek, educated, mends my halting sentence. Your men are not bad fighters. He caught Bellerophon who, more impetuous than his master, prolonged the order given him by a body that had fallen some half hour since on the heap of the vanquished. He remembered only one word. It was "forward." He led the charge, pursued the Mithradateans unbridled till at nightfall this Spartan caught him. Thought of a device practiced somewhat by your wily people. Let rein loose and allowed Bellerophon his whimsy. Bellerophon stepped daintily, he tells me, across heaped bodies till he found me. His breath wakened me. By some singular illusion I believed it was the breathing of Olivia. I beat him off crying "Hipparchia—hear me." The Greek answered my cry, singularly couched in his own language. It seems the deepest abyss of my unreliable being claims your bounty; Hipparchia, a name, saved me. Take what is left of your unworthy

Marius.

XIV

Hipparchia was tired of Verrus. Facing him, she saw with no illusion, a peaked face finely intellectualised but petulant. Petulance spoiled the effect of dignity that the large beaked shapely nose gave to the

forehead, the distinction of the fine line that curved down again to a full mouth, cut not unbeautifully but singularly marred. By petulance. Small wrinkles, set close, defined this quality, two odd and unexpected comments on the firm flesh. A flesh suggesting fullness, but so far in its youthful contour, in curve and in tone quality, singularly charming. Honey-marble again met honey-marble. They were adequately mated, he with her archiastic affectations, he with his late Egyptian tendencies. He subtly guessed, deferred to her own preferences, save now, recently when petulance set that ineradicable mark upon the forehead.

He wore his bordered toga in the scholar's fashion, slightly careless in all appearance. Priest, scholar, young patrician. All that was easy to read in the face turned to meet her. Adequately patrician, scholar, she was sick of all that warred in him, marring the symmetry of mind and body, so perfect, so singularly patterned for perfection, marred by sloth, by singular indifference. This was (to her) wickedness: Verrus, endowed by birth, by position to accomplish some rare feat of scholarship let lie fallow all this field of mind and spirit. He said singularly, in whining accent, "but how Hipparchia, can you expect me ever to finish the laborious undertaking when always these half-Greek secretaries never can catch my meaning?" She faced him, feeling the calm approbation which so far had dictated her attitude to all his undertakings, turn violent. "You blame always the latest secretary from Athens. You. What are you to blame men so singularly subtle, trained in all scholarly definition?" His eyes opened, surprise wrote another furrow on the white, firm-fleshed forehead. The hair, forward flinging, needed (she noted with irritation) to be trimmed more carefully. She said, vixenishly, all the suppressed pedant in her souring her sweetness, "why don't you have your hair cut properly?"

Verrus set down the heavy lump of patterned turquoise (used to flatten out the upcurling corner of his stretched papyrus) and turned toward her a face singularly surprised, singularly cruel in intent, "ah, I am unfortunately no longer of your military classes. Why since you so affect the gladiatorial fashion did you desert, so finally, one fitted in that, exact instance, perfectly to please you?" She was seated opposite the low desk at which he worked or pretended to be working.

Verrus' posture was adequately that of some higher born aristocrat who affected learning. Hipparchia knew passionately in her soul that his affectation was that simply. She resented her own people made slaves, to create of learning mere merchandize, tricked up, easy of digestion, for such as Verrus. Hipparchia noted with surprise the very ugly line his mouth made, the underlip out-curling. She said, "ah, I myself have for the last three months constantly wondered at it."

Vixenish, irreverent, she would have gone on but caught herself, like some nervous, high strung, tortured animal, some fine mettled race

horse on show, whose least gesture must finally tell for it or irrevocably against. She caught herself, so to speak, with light rein, backward. Facing Verrus she could recall the peace he had for three months given her. If now irritation on her part and petulance and sloth on his, marred the fine relationship, they must not, could not utterly spoil the sense he had at first given her, of being some rare rescuer sent by special Fate, Fortune or Providence. Irritable, irreverent vixenish, she could see herself as Verrus must be seeing her with those eyes set a little close, too indefinite in outline to command ardour, too small to appeal to the obvious taste, but to her from the first endeared by mystery, by a quaintness of humour, by a rare sense of irony, by their detachment, a little by their bitterness. All these things were in the eyes of Verrus. He shut out from her a country she adequately then was sick of. He was the cold and bitter almond that in its flowering spreads a bitter and a sweet like the fragrance of crushed kernels and faint irradiance more precious than the heavy blush of the Tyrranean roses. She loved his detachment, his aloofness, his very special appreciation of what in her was singularly aloof, untouchable and to the general taste, inadequate. He had used the very phrase of Marius. "You never leave me satiate."

By a sheer mental effort she recalled these sayings. Verrus' head was bent in profound appearance of scribe-like intensity over the spread papyrus.

XV

"I kept no tunic with bright gem." Hipparchia no longer repudiated her mother and her mother's intellectual decision. At least if she so repudiated tunic and bright gem, it was for a rarer reason. Spirit (to Hipparchia) dwelt in flesh as well as intellect. Ice-green sea-water was a huge gem and she, exquisite intaglio, was cut in it. She must hold firm to this. Regarding an image that regarded her from a salt pool, she must make firm decision. She must imprint that image on her intellect as the tortoise, bird or olive is stamped frequently on silver. She must stamp this image, this abstract nonhuman Hipparchia repeatedly on the coinage of her thought.

What was thought without emotional achiev[e]ment?

The image that gazed up at her from an autumn salt pool was an image of Hipparchia. There was a frail silver Hipparchia to be engraved, the standard of all her undertakings. Hipparchia regarded cold Hipparchia.

"I kept no tunic with bright gem." The stuffs Verrus chose for her seemed no more adequate. She was tired of long earrings that had at the beginning seemed to set some seal on her, re-value her after her contre-temps with Marius. Marius, Rome had repudiated her. Verrus, Rome (of an affected cult of Egypt) had accepted her. Hipparchia turned from her hypnotic staring at that long and silver image in the green pool to regard

casually the heap of garments on the hot rock. Purple (that Verrus chose for her) spread grape splendour over sun-steeped sea-weed. A small heap of ornaments, a zone set with an amethyst, two massive bracelets, rings, the long amethyst earrings glittered from the soft heap of garments, outer soft spun wool and (for undergarments) finest Cos silk. Heavy purple of amethyst set with old-gold seemed static heavy blossom. She remembered spikes of early summer orchid that she had then worn. She had then not utterly succumbed to massive ornament but later Verrus had decked her like some image, trying new effects against her, urging her to set off “authentic fragment” of chin, of odd cheek-turn with less lovely (he said) ornament. Cameo and agate, heavy things that now gazing at a long and silver image, she repudiated.

“I kept no tunic—nor the myrrh-scented diadem.” But though the tunic was discarded the headband still remained to clasp stray wisps of hair that glowed metallic in the sunlight. The pollen dust of inconsiderable wisps (Hipparchia’s least beauty) had stiffened with her renewed physical vigour into some proud Attic semblance of carefully coiffed temple deity. Hipparchia regarded an image that had grown in dignity. This image must be stamped in dignity, in splendour now on her least undertaking. Hipparchia with carefully arranged fillet, gazed at a silver goddess.

So she saw (in that spread length of calm sea-pool beneath her) a mirrored separate entity. It stood in weed, its feet hidden to the ankles. It gazed from suitable background of carefully sliced rock, as it might fittingly gaze from some porphery plaque infitted against temple wall, but here reversed it gazed upward and down with the head bent as an Aphrodite gazing at her mirror. Small Eros and winged Erotes should cluster like gilt wasps about this image, cluster like gold hornets about to settle on gold and flower-white thigh and honeyed bosom. No small Erotes so stared at her. The image remained silver, detached and alone and Hipparchia, gazing at Hipparchia, saw that Hipparchia was some abstraction, no warm honey-coloured goddess upon whose golden thighs and white-flower body small gold hornet-wisps of Loves should settle. The sliced sea-stone over-set with small shells made symbolic back-ground. Where wreaths should have hung, there were cold sea-shells. Where gold roses should have dropped soft petal on white marble, there was a sliced uptilted rock with no ornament further than amber sea-weed and thin scarcely wavering grasses. Grasses of frail texture wavered ever so silently like soft hair combed backward.

Gazing at that soft hair, the only frail thing in motion against that static image, Hipparchia made her own decision. She saw Hipparchia and she loved Hipparchia. Verrus could not love her as she loved herself, silver inviolable as she gazed back at herself standing with late autumn sun-light now a veritable lover, touching with electric warmth

her smooth bared shoulders. Hipparchia loved the silver cold Hipparchia and with electric fervour of sun-light on bared shoulders she conceded further, Helios. Hipparchia an abstraction so loved Beauty. Marius she must always love for having found her; Verrus she must love for having sheltered one so loved of Helios. Contemplating the stone self that so steadily regarded her, she must pierce further, further than the mere outward silver of that image. Hipparchia in the sea-pool must speak to her; from the sea-pool she must gain decision. She consulted Hipparchia as a votary the goddess. "Is it worth it? Can I stand it? Haven't I other things to do? Why struggle with it?" Struggle with it? Hadn't she in her unconscious phrasing found the answer? If she loved Verrus there would be no questioning.

But she *did* love him. Must she so to herself justify herself? Why say aloud as she did stooping for her garments, trembling in some little human way, almost small-girl like, crying over it, that she *did* love him, if somewhere (in some unacknowledged region of her mind) she had not doubted? Hipparchia shivering wrapped the purple cloth carelessly about her, then reconsidered and dressed carefully. She tied the jewels in a soft fold of spun silk to carry with her. "I kept no tunic—nor the myrrh scented diadem." The fillet still clasped her head and she shook it suddenly off, tearing her soft hair, small-girl like, in her careless fervour. She wanted suddenly, as a sun-set cloud thickened near the horizon, to cry out, "Helios even you have slighted me."

"Well, then go to him." She had turned her back to the salt pool in her repudiation and the question that she had some moments past addressed to the Hipparchia for decision was now answered. She wheeled swiftly, mechanically for the very thought seemed to have found voice, seemed to answer her. "Turn, be done, Hipparchia. Verrus? What love is that that questions? Come; fling straight forward and you must fall, white stone, weighted, unstruggling, breaking the water but once. You will not struggle, white Hipparchia. My hand will hold you. See, we will slide under this uptilt of stone to another region. Image to image, we will cling until beneficent sea-tides wash us to some distant sand-stretch. We will wait on white sand, whiter than polished stone. We will wait fitly for some god, a suitable Helios, for lover. Marius, Verrus. Intransient, alluring: false utterly." Hipparchia seemed to hear her stone self in the depth of ice-green water speak, insistent, tender. The reflected self, a wraith, an image had advised her as a temple oracle. She would not waver then indefinite with Verrus. Verrus had been disciplined in his attachment. Hipparchia would in her limited manner endeavour to appease him. She did not think for one moment that her loss would really very much dismay him. He wanted her as in the old days she had wanted Marius. "For one thing only," she had used to say to Marius. Her own words recalled, did present

service for her. Marius had been to her, what she had been to Verrus, a sort of touch-stone to some other region. Verrus had said, "I watch things, images go round and round in my head." She had helped Verrus to his images as Marius had helped her to hers; blue reaches of island coast, heavy stones that marked a temenos, miraculously guarded. Her Hesperidean garden had been her peculiar treasure. She had gone there when, tired and exhausted, she had buried in wine-red pillow a head turned from Marius as a child repelled by the too suffocating embraces of some persistent elder. So Marius had helped her. While Marius had sighed, unsatisfied, she had pressed her head close into the wine-red pillow. A cold headland whipped across her forehead. This compensated her for loss of prestige. She had paid heavily. When vanquished Niobid, she had seen miraculously clear, a blue stretch of lapis water, an upflung background of white marble, she felt no regret for generous prepayment. Sometimes a statue, sister to the one that gazed up at her from the ice-green pool would re-assure her. In her mind, she would make words for this or fling forward as on some outward screen, imagined blossom. Some white star-stalk of mountain lily. Some iris-stem, green as this water she regarded, tipped with purple. Marius had enabled her to find this enchanted garden. She had helped Verrus—whither?

"I must be back some time within a fortnight to find the exact shade to bind the peplos. Your last Alexandrian was a little scanty. Two breadths are missing from the second garment." Verrus regarded her with a cold and indifferent whimsical expression. He kept on looking at her, but his look was like the cold and lovely surface of her salt pool. There was nothing in it of humanity. It was only the vagaries of men and women that amazed Hipparchia. She was not surprised at Verrus. Nothing Verrus could or could not manage, would surprise her. Verrus was a pool, green and ice-green, and his expression now of somewhat thunderous questioning was only the reflected ripple of that storm cloud, that had gathered there toward sunset. She said, "the air has changed somewhat. It means rough weather for those tiny fishing vessels. Three floundered last time when the storm broke." He said quietly, "I don't care how many boats are broken." She said, "strange you don't care for boats, Verrus. Those things mean more to me than people." He said, "that doesn't mean, does it, that they mean much? At your rate." "At my rate—of what, Verrus?" "Of caring." "I'm anxious to retrim the purple you found fault with." "I prefer you robeless." "Naturally, my very dear Verrus. Do you realise, however, that these hot noons are bringing frostier evenings? The berries are dropping on the cliff side. I have counted flocks of pigeons, swallows, seabirds, making south. Summer is over." "Winter here is a remarkable experience." "Ah, I judge so."

She recalled exactly a certain summer evening when a storm-cloud had broken and the drum-drum-drum on the roof had beaten, frayed her tired nerves past endurance. Verrus had slept beside her. Her delicate hint for live coals had been disregarded.

XVI

Back in Rome, she was glad she had left Verrus. His final congé had been in flawless taste. Lurking in those curiously detached, slightly too close set, smallish, narrowing eyes, had been the most refined of flattering (ironical?) appraisements. "See that the purple is the exact shade to offset the exquisite contour of your chin's flawless line. I think always marbles should have draped Tyrian for their background." The horses had plunged forward. Verrus had accompanied her as far as Capua. She had curled into the body of a chariot whose jolting was again tempered with soft fleeces and mole-lined sheepskin. Ecstatic detachment, joy in her release, greater even than that which had accompanied her on her flight from Marius seemed to urge her, "there is no fear, never is fear, can be—no—fear." Round and round with the curious jolting of the flat-wheeled chariot, urging forward the driver, stopping for the slightest possible time for feeding the steeds and replenishing the oat bags, she dashed Rome-ward. Almost it seemed that her heart beats were Rome's heart beats. Rome the invincible. A message burned beneath the dark cloth of her outer garments. The letter-script burned like a Tyrian flower, the dark heart of a Tyrian wind-flower (no crystal and ice petal but authentic blossom) blood and heart-heat and black heart of disaster, battle and the wavering line of chariots, life, life the invincible. It was the delayed message hidden from Verrus. *It seems the deepest abyss of my unreliable being claims your bounty. Hipparchia, a name, saved me. Take what is left of your unworthy Marius.*

Olivia looked at her. "I thought it was a permanent arrangement." Hipparchia answered, "what, Olivia, made you think that?" "Surely one of your—position would not run off wildly on a mere vulgar escapade." "I cannot think my (as you call it) escapade was vulgar. *Was*; then you are through with it?" "I have not said so." "Well, tell me frankly, do you care for Marius?"

By a miracle, that Change, or Fortune, that had followed her, Hipparchia had found her rooms adjoining the tiny square of over-packed garden (carefully tended olive, myrtle and now flowerless azalia) vacant. The same old Phaenna, waited by the same miracle for her return. Had Marius arranged this? Hipparchia did not ask. Phaenna greeted her as if by some pre-arrangement she had left Rome for the hot summer months and had simply returned as was customary

with the return of autumn to it. The same yellow swung across the window. As if Verrus, the garden, lined with clump of carefully spaced lily, the green-ice pool she had gazed in, the lump of turquoise and the owl Verrus insisted was a hawk from Egypt, never had been. Olivia regarded her. Still Olivia. As if the summer had been a moment, a snow flurry fallen into a crater to be melted. Olivia, the Sicilian heart of some volcano.

"You kept the rooms then? You intended from the first to come back to them?" Hipparchia did not say yes, nor answer in the negative. She had been surprised herself to find them waiting, ready. Marius must have arranged it. Perhaps Marius from the first had seen to it. Left orders for some sentimental reason. Olivia was too curious.

"I thought when you went off that way with young Verrus that you really loved him." What was Olivia after? She had the pickings of the youth of Rome, of other cities. "I do love him." It seemed the simplest expedient. Olivia was standing. "That's what I wanted from you. You do then?" Olivia gazed still curious, curiously thwarted. "You *do* love him?" "Olivia, since when have you become Socratic?" "I don't know what Socratic signifies. Nor care much. I want to know if you love Marius?"

"Whatever makes you ask it?" "Can't you see, Hipparchia, we are everything to one another. He sent me by special courier almost daily messages." "Ah?" "Well, really, daily. They came erratically. Sometimes as many as eight done in one bundle." "How singularly romantic." "Not only that. He wants to risk his everything. Make me mistress of his mother's old place on the Aventine." "Marry you, Olivia?" "Yes, certainly." Olivia bungling her narration was lying.

"Hail, loved of Fortune" ironic, captuous, Hipparchia too was standing. "By the way, how did you know I had returned to Villa Ionia?" "I have, Hipparchia, many friends in Rome. And servants." "Ah?" "Friends, servants *will* talk, discuss, in their trying manner everything. My flute girl saw your old Phaenna buying myrtle branches, so obviously at this season extravagant. She said only the return of her mistress could explain it. I said Hipparchia was—visiting in Capua. She would not be disregarded. She actually questioned your Phaenna." "Who said?" "That it was, obviously no business of a lupa (choice word) to enquire of *her* mistress. I knew then certainly Hipparchia was not far distant."

Olivia, coarse, elegant, her fibre softened somewhat by the summer ravages (*where* had she spent her summer?) her eyes burning large, improbable, vacant, unintelligent, luminous, still waited. What could delay her? Hipparchia waited.

It occurred to her that there was something comforting about the very virile presence of Olivia. Rome, Rome the insuperable. Elegant,

superb, the woman opposite her (in spite of her rare superior judgements) fascinated her. Hipparchia drew nearer as one perched on an ice pool may after too long and exquisite contemplation of ice and glacial iridescence, look upward to the blazing fire of a volcano. Take comfort from it, for all its danger signals and the scars of ruined vineyards on its shapely dark flanks. She regarded Olivia, taking comfort from her sheer vitality.

XVII

She had helped Verrus—whither? Now Hipparchia looked at him (a month after she had left the Capuan villa) the cold rock waters were again around her. Seated in her lion chair whose arms were lions inset (lapis eyes drawn slender, lion smile outlined in lapis in the Egyptian manner) she asked patiently, whither? Verrus' regard was the regard that a month since, met hers, her eyes, half-veiled in the dark stuff of her travelling garment. The same poignant and intent yet utterly inhuman appraisal. He was about to say exact in tone and in exact ironic inflection, "dyed Tyrian is the only fitting background for authentic marble." He would, unless she spoke, soon say this or that other, "fragments from those lost mounds, Pers[ia]n riddled, of the Acropolis, should be safe-guarded." Had he made up these caustic compliments, offered them perhaps after careful thought, practice, self communion? It surprised Hipparchia to find Verrus facing her, no more than it had surprised her to find the lion-smile still satisfactorily outlined in lapis on her chair arm. Verrus was a part of her furniture, of patrician antecedents. He fitted into her consciousness so perfectly that he was no more to be regarded, to be disregarded, than the chair she sat in. "Verrus left Capua looking Elysian in this weather?" "It was, at Capua, always Elysian." Hipparchia recalled the drum-drum of a storm that had beaten her high strung nerves to a spun web of ravelled pain; that had threatened her extinction. She recalled the cold flat brightly-tinted surfaces of the gods she had, in wakeless dawn, more than once, regarded. She was as indifferent and as touched by Verrus' presence as she had been by those fixed static effigies. "What brought Verrus to the Villa Ionia?" "Olivia met me." "O, ever the same Olivia. She looked beautiful?" "As beautiful as paint and waist-long emerald earrings could well make her." "That woman fascinates me." "Enervates precisely." He spoke as one speaks of some doll at a circus. As one converses of some mannequin waving tinted plumes attending an eastern emperor. He spoke warmly as he cut her, saying, "she tells me Marius returned to Rome, forgets you."

"It seems so," Hipparchia answered. The drum-drum[m]ing of a torrent of unassailable longing threatened her. Seated in the lapis chair, she remembered, day by day, in all its trivial detail, Marius' many visits to her. She saw suddenly a new solution. "Did you order the rooms to be kept on here for me, Verrus? It seems somewhat of a mystery.

Olivia considers it her duty to ascertain who arranged for them.” “She discovered?” “It appears not.” Verrus standing, faced her. “The Villa stays at Capua though I leave it.” She purposely misunderstood, halting in making comment. She waited, not wanting further speech of Verrus. “This as well then is your place?” He answered, “I arranged to take it on from Marius solely for your convenience.” Marius had not left it. Why had he then so written? Was it possible by some trick of sun-stroke he had mistaken her for dark Olivia? In his meandering fever, in his frenzy, his war-fever, mixed them utterly? She was not wholly complimented. Facing the equivocal, thin-lipped smile of Verrus, she envied in a moment the more stalwart woman. She recalled the dark form, curious, alert, coarse, adequate to dealing with its own and any other person’s situation. She remembered Olivia’s visit to her some days after her return from Capua. What had Olivia wanted? Obviously to ascertain her purposes.

She said waiting, “I was not satisfactory to Marius. I have lost heart for loving.” He spoke intuitively, “you love Marius.” She answered, “I don’t know. He was made up of my escape from people, from Greeks who had a pre-conceived idea of me, who threatened to make of me a carping pedant, that simply.” He said, “no Greek even could make of you, Hipparchia, simply a carping pedant.” She said, “they got my mother through appeal to intellect. She went off, putting aside her patterned robes, her bracelets, her beautiful saffron and dyed shoes, her lovely woman’s sandals, the high boots she affected as the very assiduous and proper wife of my dour father.” “Crates the cynic?” Facing Verrus, she saw now why she hated him. His was that same dry smile, that same Crates-twist of countenance. Why had she never noted it? The softness as he smiled then recalled her uncle to her. She had loved Verrus because he was like young Philip.

When Verrus left her, Hipparchia kept repeating over and over and over like some trite charm “he is like young Philip.” She was back, it appeared with the family problem, treading round and round and round. Like the donkey in the old grain-presser who walks round and round and round. So wandering round and round, would she finally evolve from the rough grain, the rough primitive matter that was her problem, meal fine-sifted, fit for nourishment or better still, for cakes for altar sacrament? Maybe. She was now numbing her fine sensibilities by wandering, mule-like, round and round. Treading the rough primitive stuff that was the very essence of her nature, into some fine sublimated matter, meal, ground fine that would finally (she must hold in her degradation to this hope) prove spiritual nourishment.

So she prowled round and round the room where each article starkly defined, cut off the memory of ice-green water, of healing cold and fragrant spires of orchid, of peace in a pollen-dust of sun, of adequate nourishment physical and mental, even of the first rapture of her sheer materiel possessions the new webbed stuffs, so delicately tinted to suit her preference, the exquisite unfamiliar feel of the very new spun stuffs that Verrus with his Alexandrian connection had got for her. She must put them aside as her mother had put aside painted shoes, embroidered tunics, the "myrrh-scented diadem." Hipparchia folded the swathes of exquisite materials that had been cut, under Verrus' supervision, especially to suit her. She could hear as she folded the soft garments the very intonation, half ironical (or was it wholly mocking?) "Hipparchia should essentially be draped in purple. Authentic line and Acropolis buried treasure should be fitly decorated...the ear's authentic fragment." She supposed now with her nerves over-strung that he had absolutely mocked her. The very room she stood in lost its permanence. She must obviously make other plans, dismiss Phaenna. Hipparchia waited while a wind, some distant Boreas, the evil Roman winter weather, swept down on her. Outside she knew the lilies were wind-slashed, the leaves of that rare Nile lily broken against the hard marble of the minute fountain basin, with no possible flower-lip of scarlet.

Fate followed her. Did she deserve this lashing? She thought so. It was Philip she had left, when she left Verrus.

XVIII

Marius stood before her at last. "But Olivia tells me you are still in Capua." She regarded Marius. The same. Thinner. The heavy spaces, chin, cheek, throat, rounded with muscles, it seemed, gone hollow. The face grey almost in texture. Was this the result of illness or intense emotional experience? Almost, it seemed, she was gazing in some enchanter's mirror. The very room, the very garments, so adequately chosen to suit varying moods, the green, Olivia so arduously affected. "Ah?" Her voice came strange, shrill, clear, the voice of one wailing under some possession. She was, it seemed, in the manner of the barbaric Asiatic priests, victim of some possession. Or was it some high spiritual cult? Delphic or of the islands? Was it Phoebus who possessed her? She must in her degradation believe something, hold fast to something. Yes. Round and round and round. The mere family problem had ground out this fine meal for future spiritual nourishment. Humanity had proved treacherous because she was meant for other, things different. Regarding Marius, she said over and over and over, "whom the gods love, whom the gods love". She had died simply. For some god (Helios?) loved her.

"Olivia told me you were still at Capua." He had thrown off his cloak. The room was fitly lightened. In the late afternoon, the brazier she had come to associate with Marius, threw off luminous ruby.

Small garnets from the brazier burnt on the white flat marble. Ruby, garnets, Tyrian colour. Anemone-flower purple, rare and singularly enchanting burning colours. Not Marius' colours. Helios, some god who would yet champion her in her foul degradation. "Olivia told me you were still with Verrus."

By some singular chance, some fate, some curious twist of mind, of character, she did not hate Olivia. Olivia was an instrument. Some one god had sent to break her from her human bonds, her human degradation. "Ah, Olivia—so, very kind. She looked me up on my return from Capua. She had seen old Phaenna in the market. No, not she" (Hipparchia searched for the exact instance, violently she must hold herself in, search to be exact, to tell in this night-mare what was left of truth, to present some exact statement in this mire of falsehood) "no, Marius, not she herself. Her flute-girl met my servant. Things, get in telling, sometimes strangely twisted." It seemed odd that Marius should so regard her, not for one moment seeming to believe her capable of irony, of biting cynicism. He said simply, so singularly, so naively and so stupidly, "you see, Olivia loves me."

"Olivia loves me," therefore any lie, any treachery was feasible. "Ah?" Again she heard the syllable with its lingering raised tone of stark interrogation. She must ask one thing. No matter what the answer. She was already deep in the mire, sufficiently degraded, nothing to stain her further. "Why feeling as you so suitably do Marius, about Olivia, did you so singularly write to me at Capua?"

Impelled by ancient habit, she laid her hands on the close-cropped hair, that helmet, and the heavy head that lay heavy, sullen, sudden a dead weight in the saffron of her old pre-Capua garment. Marius had flung himself face downward. "Hipparchia. To see you reminds me only of death, the terror, the horrible and final waiting." She perceived that Marius was not strong to face the final testing-out of spirit. He had loved, desired her when a force stronger even than Olivia had faced him. When he faced Death, he had recalled Hipparchia.

She was then in this peculiar predicament. If Marius faced her, he faced dire memories, the long death-plunge forward. The slipping of the loosened knees from the traitorous onward rushing saddle. The swerve forwards. The utter stark annihilating blackness. "Dear phantom." She was to Marius, now more even than in the pre-Capuan days, an episode having to do with searing, blinding excursions of the spirit. He feared, she felt it, the heady supersensuousness of Spirit.

As she coughed lightly, she felt the weight of the close-cropped head lifted to regard her. She endeavoured to focus humanly, precisely, intelligibly, her eyes, which had been seeing elsewhere. She realized the shock of this returning had frozen her, made her veritable marble. Marius, Verrus himself could not be expected to understand that such frozen intensity was a sort of super-sense (feeling merged with intellect) and when they complained, "you feel nothing," she was at the very exalted height of ecstasy. If Verrus himself had somewhat misunderstood her, could Marius, so different, save by some subtle miracle of intuition, fathom this? She felt her face grow stiff, her muscles glazed into an unbecoming and, she felt it, irritating simulacrum of a smile. So frozen, unbecomingly (she felt it) smiling, she could find no word to stop him, no phrase to hold back the overwhelming rush of emotional protestation. "The hands, the hands." He cried out "when fire and flame reach up, in delirium I embrace them; when death and vile emanations threaten to suffocate, when peril has me by the throat they save me. There is one deity not utterly unperceiving and not faithless; Hipparchia." Covering her hands with suffocating, smothering kisses, he said, "the hands drew me from death and flame. The cold hands that nothing can disentangle from my spirit." Struggling from him, she felt all this false, theatrical. Struggling, defeated, she saw only as in an enchanter's mirror, the other, the soft poppy-dust on vacant eyes. The light of Sicilian forests which she had not coped with, had not deigned nor dared to rival. She saw with her own eyes, with the eyes of Marius, with the dark eyes of Olivia, Olivia. She saw Olivia as Olivia must see Olivia. Seated in a low chair with small feet crossed, cornelian encrusted. Gazing with vacant, shallow great eyes at an image that shone back from the polished metal that a slave held. She could see with the dark eyes of Olivia, Olivia, satisfied, hang from a heavy ear-lobe an enormous pendant, "waist long" as Verrus put it, where light, reflected, caught sun as from a green ice-pool. Mingled in some horrible phantasy, vision superimposed, she saw with her own eyes, white Hipparchia who from her own ice and green sea-water looked out to regard, as her reflected image, dark Olivia.

No, no, no, no, this way was madness. Now if Marius touched her, she felt her very form beneath those equalising soft hands turn, by some enchanter's craft, into the very substance of Olivia. Marius, should he protest from year-end to year's bitter and winter-blighting end, could never now caress her without superimposed stark images of madness rising to defeat her, to defend Olivia. Surely this was a veritable Gordian complexity. This certainly was evident; Marius had cheated both her and Olivia. She herself had cheated Marius; had she Verrus? Verrus had, she imagined, cheated no one in his thwarted sloth, but

Verrus. Olivia, Marius, Verrus and Hipparchia. Was there no end to this mule round and round and round that ground fine the very substance of her spirit, from which ground and beaten substance surely some phantom sometime must arise, to appease, to simplify, to clarify the situation. Marius stood thin, grey in the early morning.

She was afraid now of Marius. Having once assailed her, he could so easily, for such little pretext, find occasion to revisit Villa Ionia. The whole place was blighted for her. She had now no more Marius, bright brazier of live embers, the Marius she had longed for, during the curious prolonged days at Capua. She certainly had lost Verrus. Rome (Olivia might have told her suitably) was full of lovers. She would not see Olivia. She must not ever, if her faith held her, allow this new manifestation of Marius near her. If faith held her, that fore-knowledge that stronger than any mere affront from mortals, was some God's blessing. Stronger than mortal affront. She held, steadying herself in the cold dawn, the heavy cloak while Marius re-arranged his complicated beltclasp.

XIX

She was back with the family problem, treading round and round and round. Like the donkey in the old grain-presser who walks round and round and round. So wandering round and round a room stripped now of saffron window curtain, of embroidered Indian wall hanging, would she finally evolve from the rough grain, the rough primitive matter that was her problem, meal fine sifted, fit spiritual nourishment? "I take nothing, Phaenna, with me but these old garments." No use, Phaenna, whimpering. No use, poor old nurse-goddess, Phaenna was like Demeter, a nurse-goddess, bound in adversity to her fosterling. Hipparchia was born of her experience, no longer stark with girl features as if some Artemis were still hesitant between girl and boyhood. She no longer felt frail, with pollen dust of wisps of hair (a least conscionable beauty) to appeal to tenderness, to the protector (who but some god was?) of half-awakened womanhood. She heard the old tireless reiteration, "Hipparchia who so cleverly knows everything, so patently knows nothing."

She knew it now. It was no use at all. She knew now actually what she wanted. She wanted intimacy without intercourse. But who offers comradeship without passion? She walked round and round a room stripped now of Syrian tapestry, her thought with her going round and round and round. "Olivia told me you were still at Capua."

It was cold in the disordered chamber. The saffron lengths of curtain that Phaenna had just (grudgingly) taken down for her, trailed crocus-length on the cold pavement from which Hipparchia had removed light panther and lynx coverings. Panther and lynx—

she beheld them, wan Bacchante, as the last visible embodiments of that Bacchus who had caught her, shivering, a "phantom" from some covert. "Hipparchia—to-morrow—or after?" She had said "any day after, not to-morrow, Marius." This was "to-morrow". He would know that Hipparchia had loved him by this swift flight. When Olivia, Myrilla (or whoever it should be) would be old with pencilled brows and thick paint to show deficiencies, Hipparchia in memory should remain white and wan and "phantom" cold in first dawn. Saffron trailed like a mist and like a dying sun-set reflected colour in cold marble and in walls divested now of embroidered Syrian and Indian spun silks. Small red buds of the Indian cloth Marius on one occasion had left with her and wide fringes of delicate plaited cords must go back to him. "These things, Phaenna, are for Decius. See they get to him."

Hipparchia felt lighted, exalted by her swift decision. She wound lengths of bright hanging, superior to the winding, spinning and destroying Sisters. She was beyond Fate, being to herself the Parcae. She had willed these years of sun-steeped plenty. She had revoked them. She was now cutting them from consciousness like the last Fate with her great shears. Hipparchia bound and fastened the separate soft stuffs. Phaenna piled more materials from the inner chamber across the lion-smiling arm of the low chair. More spread across the couch, now showing a bare mattress where once wine-red cloth had spread a very anemone field for seated young Europa. "These things, I believe belong to Quintus Verrus. See anyhow that both letters are delivered simultaneously when I've left." Phaenna regarded her, stoical, grim, determined, destitute. "Madame, don't you think you might anyway let Sir Verrus come, see for himself, go over this with you?" Phaenna a mythical presence, a freed woman, a type almost vanished, devoted in adversity, slyly plotted even at this last hour, for her mistress' benefit. "Phaenna. I take only a few old clothes. We have enough already for our pilgrimage. That chest with all my manuscripts, the rolls, parchments take much room. The folds of cloth, the things I had years ago, all saffron, will best answer. These others anyhow don't suit me." She indicated with a last renunciatory gesture the gay fabrics. They didn't suit her. Not any more. They didn't any more become her. It was with no real feeling of renunciation that she left them; Hipparchia, her mother's gesture, was a fit one. Wandering off with rough script, with nothing but the bare necessities. Hipparchia had wandered off with the dour old Cynic on her pilgrimage. Hipparchia the second could do likewise. But her companion was not dour. He was young and frail with the frailty of some enduring cypress. He was tall and fine knit and alert as any panther. He had agility and power and swiftness and he was admirably fitted to teach, to fill her mind (Verrus did not care for Theophrastus) with all the latest discoveries of the Continent.

He knew the Asiatic wisdom, was alert as well to all the modern Roman, knew his islands. There was one Philip. He remained stark and cold and tall and agile and intelligent. Marius would talk of poets, knew his histories, his Thucydides, Herodotus. Polybius even. Roman Marius was abreast of all the latest modern writers that swarmed from destroyed Carthage, from the numerous broken cities. Marius had once filled her with a desire to live but he was not white and cold and flawless. Marius was full of flaws, absolutely human and inhumanity now claimed her. The personification of which stared at her from walls of cold marble divested of silk, of Syrian woven pattern, of bright Indian scarlet fringe and old stuffs from Alexandria. The lion-smile of her lapis arm-chair still smiled its satisfactory cynicism, not the cynicism of her father Crates the professional pedagogue, but the more worldly cynicism of Verrus. "Authentic fragment should be draped in Tyrian." Philip was that. Authentic but no fragment. He stared at her with wide eyes from the stripped walls. He stared at her, minute, diminished when she caught sight of a distorted Hipparchia in the silver cup she carried. "Make place, Phaenna, in that basket for this last cup." From a chased pure metal goblet an odd face considered her. It was odd, a little out of focus but clear and flawless and intrepid with its purpose. It was herself (yet Philip) facing her from a pure goblet Marius had once brought her. "Wine then flows from you, Greek intoxicant." There was one intoxicant of the intellect. It was a white intoxicant. Marius was perhaps right. The grape bunch in Aphrodite's corridor (the verse was Moero's) should be white and pure and honey-fragrant. Wine then flows from you Philip. In memory she staggered uncertain, stiffened then as one gazing in an enchanter's crystal. She again saw Philip. "Phaenna hurry with the out-door wrappings. The farm waggon is due here presently." She saw Philip, as she moved half consciously with her packing, with her final preparations for this last flight to Tusculum. "You know the way Phaenna. To-morrow will be time enough. Take these things for your nieces. The cart returns with produce in the morning. They say they'll take Phaenna back at night fall. You'll like to see the farm again Phaenna. We haven't been there since old Doctor Gratius sent us (was it last year?) when I had that fever." She recalled the various precise beauties of the farm lands around Tusculum, seeing in her mind as in an enchanter's mirror Philip falling forward. Her cry "Philip" was stifled by the sound of Roman legions. They were even then making their first tentative excursion toward the Mithradateans. Far and far and far like some prophesying sound apprehended in a trance, she had heard bugles, the heavy dragging tread of many cattle and the neighing of horses. Far and far and far as in some Pythian trance (presaging future happenings) Hipparchia had heard the bellowing of the cattle, the neighing of horses, the odd speech that presently

accosted her. The Roman soldier who pinioned her at the elbows was not rough, shook her gently though she did not see him. She saw as far and far and far, as one peering after long baffling concentration into an enchanter's glass for final solution of some dreary problem, the face of Philip. She saw the face of Philip as the shoulders (in that fraction of a second) lost their tension; the tense nervous upright bearing of her foster-brother came before her and the surprise that Philip could so weaken. She was surprised that Philip should fall as she might have been surprised at the precipitate plunge forward of some flawless, dedicated statue. She saw the arrow that exactly pinned him and his arms flung outward and the very spray of the wild flower he had stooped to gather. The arms were widespread, the head back bent. O vanquished Niobid. Philip, Philip. There was one left, just one left. One of the Niobids left. Hipparchia went on silent and determined. "Phaenna I must finish that book. Don't be distressed about it." She lied outright. "I shall be seeing one or the other later. Don't take it seriously. I must be alone to finish the book that Philip left me. Don't be long following me Phaenna. Tusculum is beautiful in spring time."

XX

A reflected Hipparchia somewhat distant, minute and distorted in a silver goblet was the renewed and exact image of her love for Philip. It came back now she was established safe at Tusculum. Her manuscripts trailed across the low bench, her work-bench, where she had piled her various awkward parchments, tablets, the various implements of her calling. She was established in Tusculum like any ardent pedagogue, all of her father Crates alive to see occasion for a last valorous output of intellectual effort, in the minute reflection of fleck and flaw in the rough woodwork that told of the sun setting. Light across rough boards warned her that the day was almost over. Sun setting across rough boards magnified out flaw and fleck in the rough wood of the old farm room that was her work-room. She concentrated on unimportant minute detail of her exact surroundings lest her mind wander toward almonds flowering above Tusculum, toward Ostia rare with lapis hyacinth. Almonds were dropping silver petals, drifting through pastures where white great cattle stopped browsing to lift huge goddess-eyes to watch her. But those lures must remain fragile, evanescent beside the lure that came now more frequently than she had ever known it. Her heart and body and mind were filled now with one ambition. "I must get the book done." Poems must be inset in her fare research manuscript. She would not stop at mere scientific exposition. Theophrastus had done better than she or even Philip ever could have managed. Hipparchia was building, or rather further ornamenting his already perfect background. Her work was a correlation of gods,

temples, flowers, poets. Why the Bacchus of Ariadne chose the purple ivy, why the Hera of Argos favoured heliochrysos. Her book was a fervid compilation of poetry, religion and ethics. Gods and their various amours lighted heavy paragraphs of exact statement and enumeration of the science of the islands. "Greece is now lost, the cities dissociated from any central ruling." Marius would see how lost; Rome would reconsider. Hipparchia worked with flaming mind to recapture some half-obliterated fragment. Her compilation was exact, would be exact, specific yet withal exquisite. It was necessary to insert just here the rendering of Moero's grape song.

*You rest upon a golden bed,
in Aphrodite's golden house,
O grape (O Dionysius bled
when you bled purple and grape-red)
you lie within the golden place,
and all the honey-grace and sweet
of your vine, mother-stalk shall not
protect you with its flower and leaf.*

She looked up (casting aside her faulty stylus) as the sun did finally flame out his last defiance against the opposite row of furniture, her dressing table crowded against the wall, the chest and her various odd belongings. Her belongings showed crude within the orb of pure fire that the sun dropped flaming through her curtain. Candles must flicker in darkness now but Hipparchia (still wedded to her manuscript) found she had no heart for the inevitable interruption which must be should she call Phaenna to bring lamp and candle. In uncertain light, she reconsidered her fervid rendering of the grape-song. It wouldn't do. The translation in the heavier language read faulty, repetitive. It was as if a light that had been burning in clear agate was set now in granite. What the Greek could manage with his honeyed delicacy of curious vowel syllable, the foreign tongue was forced to contrive by neat fitting of pallid mosaic. Here wit and shrewd planned phrase and intuitive neat turning of phrase must net the senses; astonishment at neat paraphrase must serve instead of true intoxication. The translation into Latin was the dark sputtering of an almost extinguished wick in a earth bowl which before had shown rose in alabaster. Moero was alabaster and her spirit was pure fire. As soon think of putting the run and vowelled throat of a mountain stream into chiseled stone, as to translate the impassive, passionate yet so coldly restrained Greek utterance into this foreign language. "Romans are wine pressers. Not badly spoken." O Philip, Philip. Help me. Help me with diabolic intent to bring over into this barbaric language what possibly can be so transposed; thought,

religious precept, religious phraseology. The very names (Hipparchia thought) of the Greek gods still held virtue. Virtue was in their spoken and in their written characters. If she wrote their names often enough they would serve (as some Eastern charm) eventually to destroy Rome. "Greece is now lost, the cities dissociated from any central ruling." Marius would see. Rome would see. No, he wouldn't be interrupted by old Phaenna's entrance with the candles. Phaenna would have some tale of cheeses, of the new guests above Tusculum, of some tiresome broth or porridge. Hipparchia didn't want to have her flaming mind accosted with mere material considerations. But she couldn't in the dark see further. She couldn't see in the dark to outline the other poem, the hyacinth and the shepherd which had so long escaped her. Sappho in Latin. It was (now he came to reconsider it) absolute desecration. It was desecration to translate it. She decided not to re-render the hyacinth on the mountain side. She would let that rest flawless. She would quote it entire in Greek. The Greek words, inset in her manuscript, would work terrific damage. She almost saw the Dictator's palace overpowered by it. She saw her Greek poets as images not as intellects; at least she saw the mind so diabolic in its cunning that long dead poems could yet remake a universe. Romans were wine pressers but they had yet to drain to the dregs the very soul of Athens. Romans had yet to die, spiritually inflamed by Athens. There were the dramatists. Euripides. Euripidean choros seemed to fit simply her surroundings.

*Wind of the sea,
O swift,
you dart with the lighted crests
of the waves,
you dart with the ships,
wind of the sea O whence
do you take us
unfortunate?*

O were they unfortunate, those conquered women of the choros, torch bearers of the spirit? The unfortunate were the chosen of God, of all gods, forever. Wind of the sea, O swift.

*Wind of the sea, O swift
cyanean-tinted and bright
blue where the sea birds dart—*

Euripides would come in his time. She couldn't any more see. She must remember, conjure, pray, recapture odd phrases; finding a half line deficient in her mind, she almost shouted for Phaenna, "the lamps Phaenna,"

but paused to reconsider. The face that never left her. It was Philip, Philip. Philip never left her. If she called Phaenna, now Philip would surely leave her. He goaded her to fresh effort. He surprised her sometimes lagging. He goaded her fine tempered intellect with his precision, with his flaming subtlety. Philip was her passion, her intellect, her mind which none had broken. Romans are wine-pressers, Philip, but if I hadn't boldly faced Rome would I know this? Would I know this intellectual ecstasy when body and brain are merged like a sword and its very victim? I am the victim of the sword my spirit. This is true marriage. Philip shows me true enlightenment. The mind, the spirit weds the mere tired body. O Philip, I am so tired.

She might almost have cried "comfort me, Marius," but the sun setting flicked for a final warning the bright lining of her parchment. It was the letter she had put there. *It seems the deepest abyss of my unreliable being claims your bounty. Hipparchia, a name saved me. Take what is left of your unworthy*

Marius.

XXI

Betrayal was her safe-guard. She must wear it, tempered armour wrapped about her spirit. Marius had betrayed her. If Marius had not written her those flaming words when in despair, lagging behind the flaming Mithradateans, she would perhaps be safe still in Capua with Verrus. But betrayal so far helped her. Hipparchia had not stayed with Verrus. Stronger than the body the mind held eminence. It was Philip who remained her inspiration. Mind and mind. She thought of those rambles in the mountains of Macedon now as her highest standard. Of intimacy without intercourse. Intimacy. She wanted it. But who save god or Philip understood her? Who save god or Philip? Philip fallen backward with the flowers of the low woody shrub he had stooped to gather, remained in some citadel of detachment, fit symbol of her worship. "I'm still left Philip. Greece dissociated from any central ruling will, ultimately, remember, rule Rome. I am still left Philip. They are ill-advised (these Romans) to bring over statue, manuscript, all the plunder of wrecked Corinth." Gardens about Tusculum were blazing with her power. Her power and the power of those statues saved from plundered Corinth were now one. She was one, wedded, merged with the Leda that stood wide-eyed under a basalt cypress to say to all the world; spirit wed beauty and destruction was the outcome. Zeus and Leda and Helen to defend him. Helen must defend her parenthood, bird and nymph wedded. "Romans are wine pressers." Romans were too crude. Could they not see that the very plunder they had saved from Corinth would undo them? Hipparchia wandered toward evening now to the new villa above the terraces.

There Leda reassured her! The conquered must inevitably conquer. Not Rome, Marius, but finally the whole world. Greek must rule. Not Rome only but the world. Leda looked beyond her mere trivial setting, the clipped bush and the basalt cone tree that made background for her. Her eyes were not even bent to ponder on that bird back, that marble lily splendour that was god spread wing-wise. Zeus must yet rule. Nor Rome but inevitably the whole world. Hipparchia was at peace in Tusculum. There were similar signs all about her, that Romans were indubitably stupid. They had broken the mere body-only to let the Spirit loose, a moth from a split chrysalis, to avenge it. Could they not see that the image born of the inflamed soul was the soul-self? Could they not see that Damocles-soul, a sword above them? "Greece is now lost, the cities dispersed, dissociated from any central ruling." There was one rule, one ruling, Spirit, Zeus, bird-wings bent backward, a Leda staring with vivid unconcern across suave lawns and beyond a second barrier of mammoth basalt cedars. The very cedars were also plunder of some Asiatic province. The gardens were all a riot of just such garnerings. Phaenna urged her, knowing of her interest in these gardens "you must meet the Roman laticlave just arrived." (It seemed there was rumour of new outbreak of the winter plague and more wealthy Romans were arriving daily.) "His daughter too delves in manuscripts." Hipparchia would have nothing of these strangers. But as late winter bloomed suddenly into authentic spring, she was lured more and more to neglect her poetry. She must neglect her lover, even her Philip, for further wandering. Hipparchia went now on bright days even as far as the half-finished amphitheatre, looking seaward over Ostia. There were masons at work there, much talk of the Greek theatre being built for Cicero. Hipparchia took a vivid interest as she watched these masons. The last of the winter crocus framed gold about the slabs of grey stone which were still to be levelled out for the auditorium. She felt, watching, like one risen from the dead, to attend the installing of some new religion. Did Rome with all its power, its dangerous forensic astuteness, realize that casual building of Greek amphitheatres in the gardens of their summer villas, must spell ultimately its destruction? Could Rome realize? She for one, would not warn Rome. That Greeks must rule ultimately. Every garden around Tusculum said it. Every garden with its suave setting for some priceless spirit. Blue lilies, from a sheltered corner, reached premature blue flames to embrace the sandal of a small Aphrodite who gazed sea-ward. Aphrodite gazed beyond the immense forest of the outer garden, beyond her very fair surroundings, She was small and clear and her body held the trace of gold that was her circlet. Her girdle was taken; her head band had been reft from her white forehead, but she still gazed amused, slightly cynical across a lawn beyond enormous dark Italian

conifers. Aphrodite gazed very far and the blue lilies rose, blue fire of altar incense, to embrace her. Blue and gold and white, indomitable. This was no Roman Venus. "Romans are wine pressers." This was no thrust, no parrying of sword play. Without, Hipparchia sensed in memory the suave murmur of the Mediterranean tideless inner ocean. "If I must ever hate him for disarming me, I must love him for his garden." Hate who, Hipparchia? No, it was not Philip. Who, was it? Had she forgotten? Hate who, Hipparchia? A pool seemed to be glazed beneath her, a face seemed to rise to reach her. Like the lilies reaching up toward the small sandal of the goddess. Hate who? Where was she? What was she? Here outside heavy sodden Rome, without Marius to protect her, who, who was she? Mind, body, experience past and present, her intellectual experiences, the fervour of her manuscripts, all seemed merged now, she could not grapple with them. Had she worked too hard? "Philip, Philip. I must get back my writing. It has grown cold. Dire winter below in Rome rises to suffocate us." She sensed Rome in the dire vapour that rose, invidious, blotting out the fire pulse of early lilies. She felt the old catching of breath, the old hint of campagna fever in her nostrils, the familiar water-weakening of the knees. The old stately metres hammered in her skull. Her feet quickened out of proportion to its measured beating. Metres formed and reformed in her head. Past and present formed and reformed. Marius, Philip, Verrus.

Which was actual communion, physical communion, which was poetry? Metres, memories formed and reformed.

Hipparchia was dazed, drugged and drunk with phrases of poems, snatches that for days she had neglected, and then found, as if the very air held static strips of authentic metre. Wandering home along the paved wood-path, past the familiar Faunus, from those upper reaches that looked across to Ostia, she recalled how she had found here on more than one occasion, an almost frightening satisfaction in the sudden appearance, from nowhere, of some magic turn of speech appearing vagrantly to astound her. "*That* Marius is religion." The metre had sometimes as suddenly eluded her but she had fought on, valiant in her disappointment. She had been so often beaten by some odd untranslatable fragment that after ceaseless modelling, remodeling, became set, stubborn, unmalleable metal in her head. Things formed and reformed and when finally discarded (it had so often happened) had a strange way of re-appearing in third startling manifestation. Her soul was filled with inspiring fire of revenge. She repeated to herself that she would avenge not Corinth only, but the whole lost and dispersed civilization of the islands. She was maddened, intoxicated with this brave phantasy. Since when, Marius, has one been able to escape the dead?"

She had forgotten the campagna mist. Her inspiration caught her on the lower terrace.

*You rest upon a golden bed,
in Aphrodite's golden house,
O grape, O cluster cold and pure
your blood is honey, spirit-fire.*

After all, was not honey-pure white fire caught in those taut grape skins? Marius had been perhaps, finally, in this instance justified. Gold, honey-white, pure ivory. That cluster, some manifestation, some symbol of the spirit, now rose most frequently to plague her. Moreover to assure her the translator's task is thankless.

She was dazed, drugged and drunk with snatches of Euripidean choros, with the new Alexandrians. This was the perfected ecstasy where body having trained its perceptions, finds itself the tool of sheer intoxicating intellect. She was dazed and in a state of drugged intellectual sensuality. She believed that her body, grown taut and strong in these long hill rambles was repaying her for this Artemisian isolation. She was surprised, annoyed, finally disgusted when, toward evening, she stumbled forward into her low-beamed room, fell face downward between the heavy curtain folds and was conscious only when hours afterwards an evil manifestation of earthly solicitude (poor old Phaenna?) tried ceaselessly (in endless, never varying round) to wake her, to feed her, to wake her again. She was back with the family problem, treading round and round. She seemed to have been cast out, a frail spark which no one wanted. She seemed to have been ground fine and fine and fine, fit spiritual nourishment. She sensed herself at last separated from her family and her family problem. Round and round and round the stones had ground her. Verrus, Marius. Stones to grind her, to send her—now she saw it clearly—back to Philip. She was back with the family problem treading round and round and round. Meal ground fine, fit spiritual nourishment. Go away, go away, go away. Go away beautiful Hipparchia. Hipparchia her mother, rose most frequently to plague her. Hipparchia faced Hipparchia, her mother, who rose to plague her. "I could have told you there was no use. I put away my Lydian embroideries, my lovely shoes with interweaving ivy and with vine leaf," Hipparchia reiterated. Again Hipparchia her mother, seemed to say, "I could have told you, there was no use." So round and round and round. Hipparchia was ground now, fit spiritual nourishment. Was it her mother Hipparchia who so ground her? "No, no, no, no, no, I tell you mother, mother that they helped me." "Helped you?" Round and round and round. "There is no help save in renunciation. I could have told you. I kept no tunic with bright gem!"

“But I gave them all back, all back, all back to Verrus.” Round and round and round. It went round and round and round. “You did not give back what you have never taken.” It was Hipparchia a spark thrown off between the upper and nether stones of her betrayal who cried out to champion wan Hipparchia.

Hipparchia would protect Hipparchia from Hipparchia. “She never took, she never took, she never took. She was more brave than you, Hipparchia who never dared take.” But that was not right. Hipparchia, Hipparchia. She cried “Hipparchia” and Hipparchia would stand there and plague. “Go away, go away, go away. I have this left. I have this, Hipparchia. I found it on the way back. It will endure. It will stamp me as one of the chosen of Wisdom. My fame excels as Wisdom’s must excel mere winners of hill games. So yours. So mine. But mine would not have excelled had it been a mere feeble copy, a counterfeit of yours. Hipparchia I have triumphed. I found it on the way home. It was written in authentic metre in the air above me—

*You rest upon a golden bed,
in Aphrodite’s golden house,
O grape, O cluster cold and pure,
your blood is honey, spirit—fire—*

Phaenna, Phaenna, Phaenna, Phaenna—my writing tablets—
let me have the stylus—”

XXII

Rain beating on a low roof recalled her to herself. Where was she? Villa Capua is perfection. If she must ever hate Verrus for his acclaim of her, she must love him for his garden. Outside a singular low rhythm told that that sea was near full. Romans are wine pressers. Then had she the Roman fever? So she went on and on, hour by hour, day by day, or was it year by year? You rest upon a golden bed, in Aphrodite’s golden house, O grape, O cluster cold and pure. The gardens around Tusculum showed patently Rome’s error. Greeks must rule ultimately and Cicero’s villa was being paved with scarlet. Red anemones paved Cicero’s new villa and from the half-finished Greek theatre a voice proclaimed,

*Wind of the sea, O swift,
cyanean tinted and bright
blue where the sea waves dart.*

Euripidean choros fitted perfectly her setting. Romans were wine pressers. Your blood is honey, spirit fire.

A dark creature admonished her, said "don't give up the purple. Keep the Indian embroideries and the small embroidered Indian berry pattern." A pattern of cornelian berries was outlined against a wall and, above her, small plaques showed a cone of light that had travelled from a far window and she had discovered something. Hipparchia was not altogether heartless. A face met hers (her own?) from ice and grass-green water and grass islands broke against her fingers, giant Thetis towering among islands. Islands formed and reformed but when she reached to get the purple wild-orchid, it was a bitter small forest wild-grape, tasteless. "I don't mean useless wild grapes. Nor those temporarily planted for ornament or mere shade." Within a planted ornamental arbour, a tall statue raised white hands to re-adjust a head-band. All gods were satisfied. Euripidean choros gave adequate witness to it. "Couches spread in the palace of Zeus." Hebe raised a small affected arm and removed a bracelet made of twisted grape bunch and of intertwining exactly mating orchid. Affectedly she placed it to one side and smiling toward Heracles from a grape-red cushioned divan, let herself be gathered. "But you feel nothing—Person." Along another divan that had arms of lion-lapis, Iris stooped from her rainbow and in an iridescent garment (we won't take these Phaenna, see that both letters are delivered simultaneously) bent to some young lord-lover. Tall almost as her lord, tall as her lordly lover who pushed her aside fretfully. "But Person you feel nothing," and again and again and again arrows shot insistent anguish. "Go away, dark person. We're going on to Tusculum. No, Phaenna. See that the letters are delivered—letters." "Ave, my Hipparchia. It seemed I had only to depart adequately to find you." "A bargain is a bargain Marius." Across a honey window a moon swam into being. Rain beat insistent and Verrus recalled the brazier. "Braziers burning in a bed-room stifle breathing." "But don't you see Verrus, you can't see Verrus, who are you to criticise any so adequately instructed as your latest secretaries from Athens?" The violets cast ruby ember all about her and a tall goddess with no sandals bent to kiss her. Your eyes—your eyes—"deft pencilled in the shadows, still retain form. You are lost, obliterated; only the scent of a saffron lily greets me. I take comfort in departure. Reading across, your wide brows the letter of allusion. Aie, aie. Your Greek script aie. And in my Roman I will parry Ave."

Yes it must be that. Philip asked other things of her. Philip said better, better, better, work, work, work. But she had worked. Philip was a sword, Philip was her mind but mind was pure god, mind was a goddess with ember violets and no sandals. "Comfort me Marius. Don't let my father get me. He wanted me to be like Hipparchia who put aside the diadem. I wear my crown. O Verrus!" In the shadow the Isis had a being. I can now substantiate as Marius said was my trying habit.

Isis is our Aphrodite of the islands. With blue lilies reaching to kiss her feet. Isis. Aphrodite. You are Osiris, Verrus. The mind was Philip who stood like a sword over me and in a polished silver goblet Marius gave me, he looked and looked and looked and looked till he turned to silver and stood over me to insist. I went on Marius, *O grape, O cluster rare and pure*. You lay within the golden porch of Aphrodite's golden house. Gold was a heavy lover. Could pure gold love woman? She no longer repudiated her mother's mystical decision. I kept no tunic with bright gem. What had she kept? Manuscript, manuscript. Letters written on the leaf. As Greeks of the old days disregarded the sheer substance of the flower as they perceived (mysterious script) the aie, aie that tells of lost Adonis or the wail for the dead Spartan. Hyacinth. A god alike indifferent to Greek and to crass Roman. She was sure now she had it. God kissed her shoulder. She was with god. "I kept no tunic with bright gem." She had piled them in a folded bit of silk and god kissed her bare shoulder. "No, Phaenna I can't bear these heavy fleeces. Don't you feel bright day-light. Day-light burning in a bed-room substantiates my being. Go away."

God would yet come to her. God would yet humour her. It wouldn't be Phaenna who piled iron weight of fleeces over her tired body. The moon-light silvered down some Egyptian coffin lid to suffocate her. Was love suffocation? There was rain on the roof. If I must ever hate him for acclaiming me, I must love him for his garden. An image of Love himself rose before her eyes. His sandals were tied with bright scarlet and a scarlet ribbon bound his forehead. He spoke—but it was a bird outside that cut with insistent anguish a mist that had come suddenly after a long ramble to the villa. A mist had come and cut across her and fever had forewarned her. That Greece must rule ultimately not Rome only but the whole world. For spirit was honey pure white fire. And Helios never yet forsook his devote. Pure honey-white fire; O cluster pure and rare. It wasn't Philip who was writing. It was a bird outside singing, singing with flame-tipped insistent anguish. Was it Eros? "Phaenna, Phaenna, who is it outside?" Nothing outside, nothing outside, nothing outside, outside. Phaenna said it was this miserable campagna mist now blighting everything and spring already with us. A dire campagna mist. Hipparchia saw the window blotted with dire vapour. Nevertheless a bird scalded with spring this outer veil of winter. With a maddening insistency, it denied the dearth of lovers, of any whom the soul had sheltered. A bird that brought her clear back to outer circumstance. "I don't mean useless wild grapes nor those temporarily planted for ornament or mere shade." A mere bird from outside now cut her clear, cut memory from vision, apprehension from exact instance. The exact instance was the inordinate weight of the fleeces that Phaenna had piled on her.

Hipparchia shook them from her shoulders and recalled the mole-lined blankets of that Capuan chariot. She recalled the present that was actual. She ran her thin hand along the outer fleeces, tugged at the fringed shawl Phaenna had thrown about her shoulders. The exact present was brought home to her by the insistent bird note that cried out and out and out that there could be no death to any whom the soul had sheltered. Marius and Verrus. The bird, the very actual bird note, ran its monotonous and insistent warfare on sloth, on misdirected endeavour, on all hideous behaviour. It would (Hipparchia was certain) soon with arrows of insistent tipped flame and infatuate singing, break through the very roof she stared at. It would soon break with its shrill insistence the very barriers of intellect, of her own brave endeavour. Of what use was poetry and inspiration? No note of hers could match the flame-tipped and infatuate singing of the creature that called, called, called through the last recrudescence of dire campagna vapours. Of what use poetry? She declined now a little from her tense posture, her valiant mental effort to readjust her values, to return to very present. Very present receded from her as her closed eyes returned to the inner world, the world of bush and tree; the world that unfolded before her shut eyes, clear in perfect outline was like some long scroll unwound before her. Of what use intellect when the brain, worn past endurance by beneficent Roman fever, finds this subtler implement? A scroll that unwinds before shut eyes, that reveals hill, wood, mountain, small lake, all minute and clarified like those very islands that she, giant Thetis, had towered among at Capua. Of what use intellectual decision? Of what use Philip? She saw now Philip along with the rest of her family appurtenances as something out-grown, something she had stepped from like a moth from a split chrysalis. This time, she had stepped entirely out of a body worn with intellectual effort and with valiant endeavour. If she had not struggled so determinedly to realize emotion, she would still see Philip as her highest idol. She would still retain Philip, tall and with rare gesture fastening a diadem, or Philip fallen backward. Philip was an image that had gazed at her, gazing in a silver goblet. Philip was herself yet magnified. She did not love herself however magnified. She loved this other world where a scroll unwound with perfect suavity, and revealed beauties that even the script of the Mitylenean could not boast of. Small tree and bush. A bird insisted still with flame-tipped singing. It broke across the scroll that was the gift of this dream state of her half recovery. It rang its insistent warfare on all misdirected endeavour. Marius? The bird said simply spring, spring, spring, spring, spring. It would, with its infatuate and flame-tipped singing, break through the roof she stared at. Capua with Verrus. Spring, spring, spring at Capua with Verrus. Bird notes brought her back to Capua with long days in sunshine. Life simply.

The bird sang spring, spring, spring, spring. Can ugliness mar any whom the soul has sheltered? Hipparchia gazed awake at a low roof through which a bird note hammered, hammered. hammered, hammered. It must break through the low roof. It must wash the roof (with its rain of sheer fire) down into a sea that had become heavy, dark, hideous, no longer the lapis blue she greeted that first day at Capua. Capua—this was not Capua. This storm of notes was no rain storm seeking to obliterate the low roof she stared at, that must sweep the shallow edifice (she visualized it) down into seething water. Hipparchia could almost see those slender marble columns, each separate, a frail sapling snapped asunder. But this was not Capua. She listened to the bird note of insistent anguish that separated her from her reverie, that recalled her to her actual present. She stared at a low farm room from which inappositely an Isis stared back at her. Isis in the shadows. Hipparchia had repudiated Isis in the shadows of Verrus' bed-room. Now Isis stood to summon her. It was no dream. Without was, for the moment, equable silence but Isis stood to summon her. No it was Verrus, it was Osiris with arms crossed and Isis stood and faced him. A bird-blue goddess (herself) stood to greet Osiris. In a room where she was fully awake, alive to each exigency. It was a farm room. Phaenna had draped saffron (as in the old manner) by the doorway. Manuscripts were piled neatly on a low bench. Others (she knew) were rolled in the chest under the bed. In this room Hipparchia had found Moero and had transcribed the difficult verses. Here she had struggled to recapture Sappho and had finally given up the attempt as savouring of sacrilege. Hipparchia had given up the Mitylenean. Here she now found Verrus. Osiris. But this exact image was in no region of her mind, a scroll unrolled in her tired head. It was outside her head. Here lay the formidable discovery. This was then at last something. Here stood Osiris out of shadow.

Wind of the sea, O swift—she must describe Osiris. She must paint Osiris. She must somehow convey in intellectual terms this very god who stood here. "Phaenna, Phaenna—my writing tablets." But Phaenna had long since refused to comply with that particular demand. "My writing tablets. Parchment." There was no soothing and familiar smooth parchment texture under her feverish fingers. Parchment was not there. Philip was not there. Verrus stood there. Verrus stood to claim her. She could go to Verrus. There would never be the smooth familiar feel of parchment under her keen fingers. Parchment too was deity. Parchment. The feel of it. Her hands tore at unresponsive bed clothes that on further consideration were smooth parchment. As she bent forward to outline (with imaginary stylus) the idea she had, of the vision she had, of the illusion or imagination that Osiris stood there, the blankets again became futile texture in her fingers. She tore at them and

called again for ink, the pointed stylus. "You will be cursed, Phaenna. Some god will blight you. Afterwards—afterwards—no burial, Phaenna. No burial for Phaenna. Bring me my stylus or you will always wander a pale ghost afterwards. Ghost. Ghost." It was Osiris that stood to justify her. "Dear Phantom." She was a dear phantom and another one had come to reinstate her. In the realm of the Acheron. Osiris in Acheron. She herself another goddess; who—who was it?

A drum-drum on the roof recalled the present to her. Rain, heavy on a low roof. A drum-drum of unassailable desire. A low thundering on the roof recalled her to her exact state and with it the actual pre-science of her past discovery. If she should ever hate Verrus for his acclaim of her, she must love him for his garden. A bird outside cut the campagna mist into a thousand tattered fragments. The campagna mist hung (she could visualize it) like a frayed and tattered garment. I kept no tunic with bright gem. The garment of her present body was worn out. Outside there was another garment waiting to cover her wan shoulders. It was blue, blue, blue. The exact instance of her discovery that she was tired of Verrus was recalled by the drum-drum of rain on the low roof. She had wanted light, a brazier. Verrus had then said, "braziers burning in a bed-room stifle breathing." Her breathing was that, her breath now was that. She called to the waiting Verrus (Osiris) that she was coming. But she was already standing. She saw herself with a blue garment standing to regard Verrus. Verrus, Osiris with hands crossed on a flat bosom regarded an intense embodiment that was the blue Hipparchia. She was the blue of the figure that had regarded her from shadows. Isis from the shadows. Io when god embraced her. "Person thinks every personable deity must be Hellenic." Her thought accorded with the thought of Verrus. She could almost see a Verrus of long past regarding her fine brows twisted over an ugly parchment. She sympathized now with his shallow scholarship. Parchment it seemed now was forbidden. There was no stylus under fingers avid with the idea the brain had sent them. Fingers and brain were separated as if a thin wire joining them was severed. The brain was Philip but what use the brain when there was no papyrus there to rim expression? If Phaenna would not let her have the parchment, there was one step further. A bird scalded with spring the outer veils of winter. But if Phaenna would let her have the parchment she might reconsider. "The stylus—parchment." Phaenna would not give in. Hipparchia would go to Verrus. Verrus stood there and herself was waiting. Herself in a blue robe. "Person thinks every personal deity must be Helienic." No, no, no Verrus. There is Isis in blue. I will claim her. I will be her. What is Hellas without creation, without the ink and parchment? If I can't work I will come. I will die for you. Let me come to you." A bird scalded with spring the outer veils of winter. A bird ran

its insistent warfare on all misdirected endeavour. All endeavour was (by her new standard) misdirected. She had severed thought and creation. Beyond was the anodine of Verrus. Verrus to regard her. Romans are wine pressers, Marius. Even Marius had, in secondary fashion, seconded endeavour. Even Marius had bade her read, had admonished her to write. No, never Verrus. He was beyond mere misdirected endeavour. All endeavour was that. "Phaenna"—if she would yet bring them Hipparchia would reconsider. But Phaenna answered her quaint insistence now no more than formerly. "Parchment. There is a word I have just found." She had found a word that applied to all endeavour. All endeavour was that. It was misdirected. A bird scalded with spring the outer veils of winter. A thread was severed between hand and brain. Philip was severed; even Marius had partaken of her love of and search for wisdom. My fame excels as wisdom's must excel all winners of hill games. She had found another answer. Wisdom was misdirected endeavour. "The stylus, Phaenna." Hipparchia went on now conscientiously demanding it but it meant nothing. It didn't any more, matter. She did not really mean she wanted it. She was through with writing. Helios had finally in this exact instance, left her. Song was futile against a bird note that cut with insistent anguish the very veils of winter. Romans are wine pressers. Not badly spoken. You do give us credit. Yes, Marius had tried to help her with her verses. Marius was one with all misdirected endeavour. Beyond endeavour lay forgetfulness. Spring, spring, spring at Capua with Verrus. She had forgotten all endeavour. Verrus waited for her. Romans are wine pressers. Verrus was hardly Roman. "The chin's outline—the ear's authentic fragment." She was no more that. She was no fragment dug from the Acropolis, from the buried debris of the Persian's conquest, before Phidias and Apelles had set their mark upon it. She was one being. Blue, blue, blue, blue Isis to recall her. Isis stood in shadow and rain of unassailable longing rose to thwart her. She felt her breath stifle her as she cried repudiating—her hands clutched feebly. "No, no, no, no, no. I will not take it. Go away. I am happy now Phaenna." To sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep,—*wind of the sea, O swift*. Go away. Euripidean choros was no fit symbol of her being. She had disclaimed a place with poetry. The Muses. Helios—Osiris now reclaimed her. Helios had left her—parchment left her, stylus left her, Philip left her. Verrus waited.

XXIII

"You look clearer eyed, madam." The old soul pottering, drawing the curtains to show the faintest of dawn-arrows valiantly making war on this campagna mist, held the brown pottery with its steaming broth to her thin lips. She said, "yes, ever and ever and ever so much better. So much better that I don't need all these extra brews, this continual

trouble that I have been to you." A rough arm was about her, stern, undeniable, a tyrannous tree-branch that held, captured in its gnarled strength, the most tenuous of snow-heaps, about to be dissolved, recalled to its own element. "I'll ask first old Sir Gratius who has been here a dozen times to see you (though you didn't seem to know him) before I change his brewings. If you are, as you say, madame, so much nearer recovery, you'll be needing (he orders) twice as much food." This door was beaten to, with a heady and terrific, vitalizing slam. Hipparchia would seek other methods. She would sleep, sleep, sleep, sleep. And this time without *arrière-pensée*, with no feeling of loyalty to her rescuer. She would so slide out to the attendant Lover who recalled her. An ecstasy, so to be maintained, requires super-human effort. She was too ecstatic, too frailly worn down now to take any stand against it. She had only to slide out, out, out, out to a world so super-abundant in loveliness that she pitied Marius, that she longed that dark Olivia might yet come to it. As to Verrus, she knew now adequately that she had loved, like poor, cheated and misguided Marius, no human being but a phantom. Phantom. "Dear Phantom." They had been then adequately and exactly mated. Marius had done well to leave her to one, Osiris exactly made to suit her——indefatigable old Phaenna was now shaking her. "A visitor to see you; wake, madame."

"You know I see no visitors." The very effort required to face the indefatigable stubborn old woman who had so inopportunistically taken affairs into her own hands, sustained her. Hipparchia regretted this required force, this force that was leaving her, that she herself must call on, must summon back into her lax floating and exalted system, to refute this other. This old traitor (it was Phaenna who had proved false to her position) who Hipparchia was sure had excelled even old Gratius' orders (anyhow why hadn't he let her alone?) and nourished her beyond necessity. Spring-spring-spring rang in her brain but outside was equable, silence. The mist apparently had lifted, taking with it, alike dire *campagna* vapours and the spirit-throat that cut it into dazzling fragments. The spirit-bird was silent. Hipparchia sat erect the better to ward off this evil. "You know I see exactly nobody. Have not since I came here." "This madame, is a different kind of caller." "No callers other than Gratius' rich clients; I told Sir Gratius as a business matter, I'd see some of his rich patrons about selling manuscripts and making transpositions of the poets." "This madame is one of Gratius' rich clients."

One of Gratius' rich clients. Some preposterous Roman woman with high dressed coarse hair, sleeked over with vitrious oil, with garments three too many, fearful of winter weather, not regarding the old rule that few clothes drape softer, and retain the body humours.

One soft garment worked from their Attic fleeces was softer, warmer than three of these bulging Roman atrocities that for the sake of appearance were dyed outrageous purple. Some fat and oiled old woman to spy on her. "Whatever can old Gratus' people want with me, Phaenna?"

"That I can't say, madame. The young lady has been here the last three days to see you." "*Young* lady?" Worse. She saw now. One of the preposterous new-rich who wanted to polish off (for court purposes) her accent. Hipparchia had had several aspirants of that sort in the old days. She saw the wealthy Roman's preposterous wealthy daughter. Without even her problematical old mother's shrewdness. Some old beaked housewife would have amused Hipparchia in her vulgarity, her insistence on retaining the services of "that famous old Greek cynic's daughter and you know she weaves beautifully." She, that problematical old hag would have wanted the simplest of cross-stitch taught her, pretending the whole time she was employing services for language. Hipparchia knew the type, in some odd corner of her soul, was drawn toward loving it. But no old matron with an eye for cross-stitch met her intolerant and, in spite of preconceived aversion, her curious fixed gazing.

Then she saw distinctly. The head with its close cap of carefully wound sleek braids was a head. out of some deserted Graeco-Phoenician temenos. Wound with braids like sleek ebony, it was a head out of some past, not so long past. Where? How had she come across this particular manifestation? The head was small yet so closely wrapped with coils and coils of carefully braided dark hair that it seemed ennobled, like some half-Asiatic child-Hera standing at the entrance to some vanished shattered temple. Chryseus (Hipparchia remembered) had let an altar lamp in Argos in the old days, set fire to a dark curtain and the temple, wind-swept, had passed into the realm of pure spirit. Greek temples had only to be burnt; that sacrifice cleansed them from the pollution that even the most holy human rites must bring. Greek temples once broken, shattered, re-gained permanence. It was a simple and too easily proved fact. Hipparchia had seen for nights, days (five, was it?), outline of temple, and small outer porch. Simple Doric column, bush of wild-aza[e]lia, flowering prematurely in some sheltered court. A fountain; some toy, left by a child, floating, a boat beside an open water-lily. A toy beside a fountain-basin had adequately proved to her that people lived there. Hipparchia had but to wait until her senses became adjusted to the beauty of porches that had, through sheer destruction, become in this other-region perfected and forever. "Romans are wine-pressers." "Not badly spoken. You do give us credit sometimes." She asked the girl (it was a girl, it was almost

a child) whether Moero had meant the grape lying in the porch, the golden porch of very-golden Aphrodite was red, grape-red, wine red or as Marius would reiterate white and cold and honey-yellow. She did ask the girl. Ah, the girl obviously was Moero. She said, "Moero, is that grape I've been haunted with for some days (five?) adequately a red cluster or sheer yellow?" Hipparchia propped herself now comfortably aloft and regarded the apparition that stood exactly squared against the dark thick curtain where Osiris, Verrus had been. Verrus? "Have you ever been to Capua? Orchids grow there straight to the cliff edge. There is a special and hypnotic sort of wild-hawk. Or owl, is it? Verrus insisted a wild-hawk. Hypnotic in its turning. One's eyes fastened to it, reconsider the wheeling (as Plato made his constation) of the earth and the heavenly constellations. Earth-constellations, you understand, are also yellow; primroses make Argo, Capella, the Wain. Have you noted in Capua a certain Chelidon? A swallow I have never, outside the Aegean, met with."

Hipparchia seemed recalled, like one jerked back rudely from some sorcerer's crystal. The very room she gazed at seemed the old and frayed-out image of some nightmare. Super-imposed still was this crystal water, ice-green from which gazed Hipparchia. Hipparchia? Olivia? No, no, no, a thousand times no. Hipparchia gazed from an ice-green Capuan sea-pool and her eyes met those of the noble child Hera who addressed her. "My name's not Moero. It's Julia." Julia? No, Hipparchia did not believe that. Strange rumours had reached her that Moero of Byzantium had only this minute crossed her bedroom, that Moero of Byzantium (dead only one hundred-odd years now) addressed her. "My name is Julia Cornelia Augusta. I am the daughter of Enneus Lauditer. My father and I are both interested in your manuscripts." Rumour proved false. This then was not Moero, the poet, whose days were purple and wine-red, whose very name called up an image of a wall banked thick with grape, red and wine-red and Phrygian purple. Moero could never have written of any golden cluster. The golden house of Aphrodite was a common citadel. "You lie within the golden porch." "Where Corinth charm incarnate, are your shrines?" "And all the gold and all the gems." Poetry was a thankless job. She was well done with it. A new art opened doors; doors led through curtains across a roof, gay with broken hill scards. Hill scards spilled rock orchid and the very Macedonian reaches (she had combed for wild flower with Philip) endured, were enduring in another element. A state, an element, to reach which you had only to fall headlong forward, after rambling, cold Artemisian days upward to the new masonic outline of Cicero's Greek theatre. Some one should warn the young lawyer Cicero but lately come to prominence, that Greeks would rule not Rome only, but prophetically the whole world.

"Some one should warn Cicero." "I do not know Marcus Tullius though my father has had from time to time odd business dealings with him." Some one should warn Julia Cornelia (what was it?) Augusta that her name was Moero. Someone fitly equip[p]ed to deal with the whole world, for Greek must rule. "Those manuscripts are locked in my old chest. Call Phaenna. She'll open it. Which papers do you fancy?" The girl said astonishingly, "I don't think to-day you're fit for business dealings." Hipparchia answered rudely, "I'm not fit for any visitor. Why did you come here?" Julia answered, "Doctor Gratius said there was a Greek here ill, wanting encouragement." "Encouragement? What impertinence." "He said you could live, were dying of a sort of anaemic ecstasy. And alive or dead the papers would prove to my father of importance." "Alive or dead, your intrusions are uncalled for." Hipparchia felt now the form, the dark braids wound round and round, the noble appearance suffering. It became blurred, Moero no more regarded her. She turned, face downward through weakness and disappointment. "Go away. Unless you're still, as I don't any more believe, the poet." "I'm not, authentically speaking a poet. I write history. My father and I are completing certain records on the Macedonian conquest. We heard from Doctor Gratius you had some manuscripts." "I tell you they are in the old box under the bed. Go call Phaenna. Only don't prevent me." "Prevent you?" "From my country."

"It is that essentially I have come for." "Have come for?"

Hipparchia felt her voice, its anaemic syllables, a very flute-echo responding automatically, picking up the last phrase, utilizing it without taking further thought, as this girl, after all, was stupid, was not Moero. "I have been for months past seeking a suitable companion. My father has outposts in the islands. We make (stopping by way of the Corinthian gulf at Athens) for Alexandria. I heard you were revising certain lives of writers, poets. I thought you might help me with my notes on Alexandria. Sir Gratius had told me all about you, Hipparchia, your mother, your brother Philip. Will you come with me?"

Some god (Osiris) loved her, but Life, Helios, cheated her. Philip was not Helios. Verrus for all his suave renewal was anodine to something other. At his best he had been opiate, making her forget. Hipparchia recalled exactly certain moods as she was gazing at that honey-thighed Hipparchia, her questionings and her affirmations. She was matched then physically with Quintus Verrus and she had then questioned, "does the mind matter?" From far and far and far she recalled certain sayings. "Can't you be frank (your eternal subtleties) outspoken in this?" She had then said, "Phoebos speaks doubly and his word cuts doubly."

Phoebos had cut her doubly from herself so that she might regard an image of absolute peace that would recall her. Osiris to recall her.

There was yet time. Staring at the sleek inviolate-head of the young woman who so accosted her, she knew there was yet time to slide out, out to the attendant lover who recalled her. Days and nights (five was it?) she had wandered in an odd region where love repudiated pain and love and pain were forever separate. Odd lifeless region where no pain is. Odd insistent bird note of renewed anguish, a bird note that recalled her to her questionings. Sappho's singing then was sheer pain? Was love always tipped with arrows? No. Love laid two hands cross-wise on a flat breast and love regarded a blue image with no attributes. Isis had no attributes. The Greeks were gods of action. Isis was a blue cloud, exquisite that waited through days (five was it?) to recall her. Hipparchia could easily now dismiss the young woman who was not Moero. "I am tired now. You'd best be going." Greece is now lost, Greece is now lost. A voice from far and far and far webbed over with its pain of actuality, its bird-note of insistent anguish, the pain of mental striving, a voice from far and far and far, "when all these Mithradatean blusterings are over—Capua—the villa—" something about Hipparchia "being set as any gem, more suitably," something from far and far about some "suave and golden Eros—" suave and golden. Osiris was waiting to recall her. A bird note of insistent anguish. Anguish that must require inhuman effort. From far and far and far, "Villa Capua is perfection. If I must hate him for his acclaim, I must love him for his garden." From far and far and far, "Hipparchia who so cleverly knows everything so patently knows nothing." Nothing? One thing. "Romans are wine pressers, Marius." "Not badly spoken. You do give us credit sometimes. If Rome yet has a soul." From far and far and far, "Greece is now lost"—Now lost? "Now lost?" Hipparchia found herself seated upright regarding a pair of beryl eyes that looked and looked. She could look down into those wide eyes as one regarding far and far and far as in a sorcerer's crystal. She could see small island and rock terraces. She could apprehend blue lilies that rose to touch a foot from which the golden shoe was broken. "Is that your garden with the statue with the lilies?" "There are many statues. There are many lilies." "Is that your garden with the Corinthian Aphrodite?" It seemed it was their garden. They had many statues. "My father collects everything that is Greek." *Greece is now lost*. "He believes all Rome will yet acclaim her. That's why we sought you. Doctor Gratius told us." "Told you?" "About your poetry." "Poetry?" Helios a god of poetry, did not forget her. Helios a god of anguish had not forgotten her. Helios a god of Greeks was insistent, bird anguish and song notes of unassailable desire. Osiris. Far and far and far, surrounded with a web of old illusion. "Romans are wine-pressers." There were many Romans. Romans. Romans. Romans built amphitheatres in the gardens of their villas.

*Wind of the sea, O swift,
 you dart from the painted crests
 of the waves,
 you dart with the ships,
 wind of the sea O whence
 do you take us unfortunate?*

Unfortunate? Helios, god of colonists. Going on and on and on. A ship somewhere. The sea. A ship for Alexandria. *Wind of the sea, O whence*—her reverie was again interrupted by the girl's voice, "Doctor Gratus brought your poems to us, I know them all by heart." By heart? What did this wide-eyed child mean by knowing them by heart? She had no heart. Julia Augusta (what was it?) Cornelia had no heart. Eyes that reflected islands in close repeated array like gems laid one within the other, going small, small, smaller—"Romans are wine-pressers," Julia Cornelia (who was not Moero) had no heart. Slide out and out and out to Verrus who awaits you for you have no heart. Wide eyes regarded wide eyes and neither had a heart. Hearts of flame-tipped and infatuate singing. "Romans are wine-pressers," Eyes looked and looked and islands were set one within the other, minute and growing more and more remote. Smaller. Tiny islands to be strung to lay upon some altar. Tiny island upon tiny island, Hipparchia had only to sink back, to drift out, out, out to tiny island upon wave-lapped tiny island. They were all in her head—an attendant lover to recall her. Ecstasy to be maintained requires superhuman effort. But why maintain ecstasy with the senses painfully alert when another ecstasy, beyond the senses is waiting, soothing, beneficent? From far and far and far—some golden Eros sometime—and feel sleeping—to be interrupted, always and always by Phaenna. "Go away, go away, go away, this last time, Phaenna." "I'm not, I'm not Phaenna. I'm Julia Augusta." A small firm hand, detached and hard as ivory, dragged her back, back when she was lax and floating going—gone—Verrus who awaited. Wind of the sea, O swift. "Come back. Don't sleep." From far and far and far the voice of Julia Augusta who was not Moero. "I know them all by heart." By heart? Again Hipparchia by some superhuman effort recalled herself, sat upright. "What do you know by heart?" "Poetry. Your poetry. All your poetry. All those rare translations. *Wind of the sea O swift—where Corinth, charm incarnate are your shrines—* I know them all, all. They helped me to love Athens. All Greece, islands that no Romans ever yet saw." Islands? Wind of the sea, O Swift. "You helped us to see Athens." Wind of the sea—Verrus? Where was Verrus? Where Osiris? Where Corinth, charm incarnate, are your shrines? "You made us love her." Love her? Love who? Greece patently. "But Greece is now lost, its cities disassociated from any central ruling."

Hipparchia now repeated it. "Disassociated from any central ruling." But Moreo would not listen. Moreo would not hear her. Eyes looked and looked and islands shone far and far and far. "Greece is a spirit." Who said Greece is a spirit? Was it Moreo? "Did you say that?" "Say what?" "Greece is a spirit. Someone said *Greece is a spirit*. *Greece is not lost*. I will come with you."

Murex

"Who fished the murex up?"

Raymonde didn't know what to think. But why think? London did this to her, blurred her acute perceptions so that inevitably at the end of her half-year visit (she always seemed to be in a state of expectation, of *laissez-aller* in London that made her feel, for all her definite little address, that she was a bird of passage) she would let go perception, let go arrow-vibrant thought. London did this to her. It blurred over too alert perception, it, so to speak, snuffed out vibration of too keen thinking. In London her fatalistic Eastern attitude was apt to become an obsession. Things were so and so. In London (from the first she had been forced to this) people did so and so, as inevitably as sun-rise and sun-set which here too, in London, had an ineffable quality of merging so that one never knew the barrier of day and night, one never outlined accurately the barrier of summer, spring and autumn. London had one season. Spring, winter, summer, they were all blurred in an ineffable half-light. Raymonde found here that corresponding twilight of the spirit.

It was therefore with a little twist of disappointment that she heard Marion at the other end of the telephone (Marion, all soft contour like a sketched-in early Raphael angel on the Sistine ceiling) saying and persisting, "I told her you had left or were just going to. I'm sorry but she would insist on it. I didn't think you'd want to."

No, Raymonde Ransome didn't want to see anyone who was going to stir her out of this last cocoon-blur of not-thinking that was her fixed and static formula for London. In London one let go, something happened, as season merged with season, and friend with friend and day and night in one delicious over-blur of autumn mist (though it was getting now just a little too cold) so thought merged with sensation, idea with image and right subtly and indissolubly with wrong. Raymonde loved her London for just this; that there was no pulse and dart of static right and wrong. It was all blurred over with one ineffable affection. She loved all of it. It annoyed her to have to pause, to make static her attitude. To have to pause and say and quite sincerely, though it was none of her affair and why shouldn't Mavis Landour (if she wanted to) have gone off with the young man, "yes shocking."

Raymonde could see Marion at the other end of the telephone and Marion's little room all in disorder and she could hear the very voice of the other odd protagonist (the Hampstead Jewess Marion pled for) with its faint under-strata of indubitable commonness, going on and on and Marion as her habit was saying, "now Ermy" (for the other one was Ermy) "you've smoked too many cigarettes. Stop smoking, have some red-grapes." For Marion had a specialised and very charming solicitude for her guests, grapes in a flat basket (it would be those same red grapes.) "You can't till you've tried, imagine how delicious they are after smoke and talking."

The smoke and the talk—Raymonde could imagine it going on and on and on, talk and smoke blurred, making again and inner fog (Marion's room) where being merged with being, where thought merged with thought, so that (Raymonde could not yet quite realising) Marion at the end had decisively capitulated. For it must have been a very vivid narrative and a very keen narrator that would make Marion say with an unwonted and unfamiliar tremor, "I'm through with her." Raymonde half losing track of the narrative in her own thoughts (would it be better than a sub-let, must she sub-let?—it would be so cold at Cret-d'y-Vau) repeated, "through with her?" And added, "With whom, Marion?" For it couldn't be Mavis Landour that Marion meant. She and Marion had decided (they said finally) long ago that Ned Landour was a mistake, that poor Mavis had a right to any happiness.

"I'm through. I give it up. Her up. I can't see in this case that it was necessary. But *you* see her."

"See her? See whom?" O the other one, it was that Ermentrude Solomon of course. "Really Marion, I can't see that I'll be any use in this matter. What can *I* do?"

"O I don't know, Ray, but be a darling. She's got some idea that you may help her. It's gone so deep. She's heard Mavis talk of you. The young man it appears has read your verses."

(Verses be damned—what had verses got to do with it, with them, with the young man she had never seen, with Mavis whom she wasn't of late seeing much, of this other, Ermy Solomon whom she had only so few times met?)

"But I don't know her. I can't see her." Raymonde might go on and on but it was too a deaf ear that she was speaking. Marion had hung up. It seemed fate had trapped her and spoiled her afternoon. Fate was fate. Such a beautiful afternoon, all kept free—for what? For drifting, thinking, for merging with her London. "Bother, why can't people let one alone. Now I'll have to go out and get some fresh cakes."

But Raymonde's rather ungracious presentiment that she would actually [have] to plunge out into the fog (so delicious in abstract contemplation, just now—late autumn—so cloying to action) was that moment interrupted—the telephone again—“O Mrs Solomon. Yes of course. I mean of course Ermy—” and the thing all over. From a long way off the same atmosphere, miraculously re-created, not the story itself (was she supposed to know it?)—“yes, Marion just hinted, didn't actually say anything. I only judged you had been worried. Yes certainly—” she must it appeared, face the music, “Come in any time now. I'm at home here, alone, will be.” Raymonde hung up the telephone and wandered towards the little kitchen.

Thursday and no Mrs Moss. Why hadn't she said, “no,” why did she care, why worry about this Ermentrude Solomon whom she hadn't so much as seen all told a dozen times? “O yes do come.” Why was she always a victim to anyone with history, with a story, with a blighted romance? “Do come.” After all (fate after all befriended her) there was more cake than she had calculated on. Plenty of cake; a lump of the old seed cake, some left-over pink-iced little ones; she needn't plunge out into fog that in abstraction was a lotos drug, something that soothed her nerves, that blurred down, softening old jagged corners, letting nothing so poignant as mere tragedy be admitted to its suave and enveloping depth. Tragedy (Raymonde Ransome had decided years ago) couldn't in England actually exist. The very contours that must inevitably belong to its formal, buskined state, were blurred out. All outright emotion and all outright facing of issues were alike merged in a sort of half state, a state of half-thought where thought and emotion blurred out any actuality of poignant decision. Raymonde had had her tragedies. London of all the world was most kind, obliterating edges. Why then should Ermy burst (as any moment now she would do) the whole uninteresting history[?] Oh she knew just what Ermentrude Solomon would say “I hadn't any idea she was like that. She asked me to Eastacres because she was so lonely. She was frightened with Ned away. I was so sorry for her. How was I to know that it was only” (what was the young man's name? Oh, yes it was, Marion said, “Martin”) “Martin that she wanted?”

Ermy now would burst in any moment and blurt that out and Raymonde Ransome had wanted to drift and dream through this obliterating afternoon. Nothing to do but listen, nothing in London to do but wait. Listen to what? Wait for what? Her every heart and pulse-beat prompted her though she said she had forgotten. She wasn't listening. She wasn't waiting. She had actually forgotten.

There was a sound of feet. There were feet, feet, feet, feet passing up Sloane Street on the way to Victoria. London had forgotten. She was one with London. She had forgotten. She came to London to forget—feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. There were feet passing up Sloane Street. She had thought she would be so happy. For these last few days so happy. She would have to remember, to think when she got to Cret-d'y-Vau. The clear Alpine air inevitably focused, brought her mind to almost clairvoyant intensity of vision. She must think, work in Cret-d'y-Vau. But not there, not here. London blurred her over permeated her and she (with London) had forgotten—feet—feet—feet—feet —feet—Feet were passing on the way to Victoria Station. Carry on. Carry on. Carry on. She had forgotten. Feet, Feet, feet, feet. O damn Marion. Damn the young man, the poisonous young man who had read her poetry. Why should this Ermentrude from far and far, by the very suggestion of her superficial, trivial tragedy force her out of her delicious blurred state, to think, think, think, think, think? Raymonde wasn't going to face the matter. If Mavis wanted the young man and if Mavis got the young man—All's fair in love and—feet, feet, feet, feet. They had all forgotten.

II

"Of course it's very nice of you to come. Do sit there. There's only one big chair. I myself, prefer this corner. Always curl here. Last time when Marion was here"—so it went on. Now they had started it might go on and on and on and perhaps Raymonde could yet keep this comparative stranger, this odd Jewess, off the main issue, out of it altogether.

"Marion is a darling. Did you see the last portrait she did for the *Guardian*? She is so clever. Nowadays it takes a separate technique to deal with editors, all that, and yet Marian does her work and by some miracle keeps in with everybody. Sheer diplomatic genius I call it. Don't you think so?" Keep to art, to diplomatic genius, to how easy it was and how hard it was to sell a picture, to place a poem, to decoy an editor. "With you though it is different. The stage." Get her on to the stage. Appeal to her amour-propre. Let her talk about herself, her work.

"I do find it more and more outrageous—" Raymonde would abuse the stage and editors—no managers—and go on and on and perhaps the afternoon would peter out, would dribble away and they would remain in the blur and throb of London, part of it, no contour, just going on abusing editors—no it was managers—going on and on and on. Raymonde had about decided that it actually would go on and on and on forever when

Ermentrude Solomon jolted her with, "things used to be different when I had my husband."

Her husband. O bother. Let her keep her husband out of it. Raymonde didn't want to hear anything whatever about about Ermy's husband. "He played Hamlet. The *Dramatic* was wild about it. He—" O, do keep quiet. Let it alone. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. London had forgotten. Raymonde wanted to shout at Ermy, "play the game. Shut up. Don't you see I am, everyone is always fighting, always fighting to—forget? Like London—to forget—feet—feet—feet—feet—feet?" Raymonde said at random, not thinking, anything to get away from Ermy's husband, from Leonard, "O, I think Marion said you loved Eastacres—" though in mentioning Eastacres she might have known that she was about to open the flood gate to the whole appalling confidence that she had up to the present, so skilfully evaded. Now she would get the full on but anything was better than talking about husbands and feet—feet—feet—feet—feet.

"What was it you liked best at Eastacres? Was it Mavis' fantastic larkspurs or Ned's exaggerated pigeons?" Anything to keep me away from Leonard and *arrière-pensée* about anybody's husband. Raymonde didn't want to hear about Leonard who have played Hamlet and the rest—she must break across that; had another inspiration, "but best of all, Marion tells me you may go to Florence." Raymonde having tactfully switched Ermy onto Florence was now, she dared hope, well out of it. How easy after all with a little diplomacy to keep out of it, to keep away from any issue. "Florence. Do go. Don't hesitate a minute. I suppose though you already know it?" Ermy didn't. Ermy had never even so much as crossed the channel. O once when she was a child. But she hadn't remembered. Ermy looked wan and somehow overgrown, weedy like a tall school-girl. How old was she? About twenty-nine by now if she was (as Marion had insisted) a widow at eighteen. Widow. Ermy. This was part of the miserable thing that they were all forgetting. At eighteen. But keep away from it. At eighteen. "Florence. You'll love it [.] Don't hesitate a moment. Clear right out." Raymonde wanted Ermy to clear out of London. Raymonde didn't quite know why, for what was Ermentrude Solomon to her? She didn't know her. Ermy had come obviously for introductions. Marion had made that clear over the telephone. Marion had said, "I told her you knew people in Florence and I told her she was to say she came for introductions." Marion (over the telephone) had outlined in her diplomatic way just how far she had prompted Ermy and just how far Raymonde was to consider herself bound to Ermy. "Don't let her bore you.

Don't care much for Ermy's tactics but can't you see?
The whole thing has upset her." And she added,
"and I can't yet make out just why Mavis did it."

If gallant straightforward Marion couldn't make that out, then how could tenuous Raymonde? Anyhow if Raymonde Ransome stopped to think why Mavis Landour had done just that, she realized that she would have to stop to think why Mavis had "done" other things. It was part of her pose, her panache as it were, her still alert and yet not quite diminished pride that she did not ask. That she has not asked in the past, seemed to her sufficient reason, that she should not now ask. "Why probe now into Mavis' odd doings?" Even now something in her inhibited her, held her back, she would not even in her thought admit there were mis-doings. Why probe into Mavis? Mavis was part of London. Mavis was a thread that ran on and on and through and through and to jerk that one highly flavoured thread out of her life's fabric meant ravelling edges, meant odd searing gash and tear in a fabric of London life that was as her very nerve and vein, fabric of her very body. Let well enough alone. The past was the past. Let alone all the odd doings of odd highly flavoured, somewhat battered Mavis. That was well in the past. And all of it in London. Raymonde had her other vivid *liés* with existence. It only happened for reasons of odd sentiment she loved London with some fibre of her being that was absent in Paris, in Florence. She loved Paris, Florence with her intellect, giving, as it were, the fine leashed fibre of her intellectual appreciation to their precise qualities. She loved London with some deep subconsciousness. There was no precision in her feeling for London. It was blurred, nebulous; she could not define her rapt affection for it. Something in her was enfolded in it. To turn outright with some sputter of ill-bred spite now against poor Mavis, meant rending some fine-textured affection, meant a new breach with this city where her relationship grew, each visit, a little more tenuous, a little more frail and wraith-like. It was the fabric of a past London through which her fine mind ran a silver thread. The present only as it was part of that past was part also of her. But London that she (fine pulsing thread) passed through had changed somewhat. It had changed. People were forgetting. Everything was different. People were forgetting. They must forget or they would go mad with it—feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—"Marion tells me that the part was splendid"—Had Marion told her that? What part. Raymonde vaguely recalled from somewhere in her subconsciousness a conversation she had carried on some weeks ago with Marion, holding to the letter of the talk, thinking,

as was her manner, elsewhere. She had trained herself (or Ray Bart the poet had so trained her) to carry on her apparently eager and ecstatic conversation and to stand posed, apart, sustained in some other region. She was doing that now, already, so early in the afternoon, the slightest bit weary, the slightest bit bored and the slightest bit disappointed in herself of some hour and a half previous that had not banged up the telephone receiver after a trenchant final parry, "but Marion, I see no one." She hadn't done that. When had she ever done that? It was part and parcel of her pose, Raymonde Ransome's slightly weary, slightly battered affectation that she never turned off anyone. "But," she must explain to some fastidious acquaintance, "You see, they're always funny. They amuse me." They amused her. They were funny. People were always that. They always had some exaggerated tragedy, always something even if it was only the cook.

Though the cook after all (Raymonde was in the early stages of first accredited middle-ageing—who of her generation wasn't?) most mattered. "People," she had been wont to drawl in a very good imitation of Mavis Landour, "are always funny."

That Ermentrude was not quite keeping up to that end of it, was not altogether to be wondered at. Jews didn't. Jews had an odd way of surprising her off guard, of pouncing on her when she was at her most Raymond[e]-ish and espy in her (all Raymonde Ransome's languid indifference to the contrary) some deep root of resemblance (how did they ever do it?) to Ray Bart. It was of course natural and she was not altogether surprised when Ermy did it. It was to be expected that Ermy would, but somehow it made her little flash of an intuition that the afternoon was doomed, the more intense to hear it, "I haven't so much as spoken of your poetry." Poetry? What was poetry? Keats, Browning. *Who fished the murex up?* "O poetry," Raymonde echoed in her most trenchant effort to be indifferent, to be superior to all that, "poetry!" What did it mean? How dare she speak of it, this odd hunched stranger, Ermentrude Solomon who sat almost uninvited in her big chair, who had come to talk about Florence? Keep poetry out of it. But Ermy kept insisting. I loved the Thetis sequence." "Yes," Raymonde admitted with a faint conciliatory shrug that the Thetis sequence had its points. She disparaged (as was her want) Ray Bart in doing it. But the Thetis sequence might yet serve. It would get the blighted afternoon the sooner over. To come back to Florence. Write the girl her introductions, let her clear off. "Florence—my dear I'm forgetting you—some more cake, no this other—now just what sort of people is it that you're going for?" Poetry might bring her back to Florence.

"Thetis yes, I did that poem in Florence. You will find you work there. Where is it that you're staying? And for how long?" All of these questions were answered more or less over tea, over another piece of cake, "but you eat nothing, you look thin—you've had nothing"—a motherly attitude, a chivalrous attitude for that have been, from the first, one of Raymonde's poses, a little part of her pride, of her panache, of her not altogether quite diminished glory. "Do tell me about this Mr Whatever-his-name-is and is he sure to pay you?" She must be practical. Come back to it, to the salary someone or other had offered Ermy as a sort of high-class research secretary. "But you know all the pictures. I think of them all, I still claim fealty to the eternally over-worked Botticelli 'Spring.' It has some sort of veil across it. You can almost pull it aside and see them dancing. Back of the Botticelli there is another Botticelli." Raymonde saw the "Primavera" as she must always see it. It was a window, simply, through which one stood and gazed; the wonder of the Botticelli was simply that those creatures stood so static. Still and undeviating in their eternal gesture. Raymonde said, "artificial. Highly sensual." Her words came to her from somewhere. Words that meant just nothing at all but that had to be spoken. People in Botticelli moved in a mist, moved in some region of super-sensuous beauty. "Beauty to be understood—" What was she saying? Where was this taking her? Raymonde did not want to be enthusiastic, to see too clearly Florence. She was still in London. Drug and anodine of autumn mists. The kettle come to a boil again on the little gas-ring. "Well now—cigarettes."

III

Behind the Botticelli, there was another Botticelli, behind London there was another London, behind Raymonde Ransom there was (odd and slightly crude but somehow "taking" *nom-de-guerre*) Ray Bart. There was Ray Bart always waiting as there was behind the autumn drift and dream anodine of mist, another London. A London of peril and of famine and of intolerable loveliness. Behind London there was the London of darkened street lamps (of "doused," Freddie used to say "glims") behind a mist and drift of anodine in an Italian background off small and precise little pincushion pink roses, there was another Italy, another Venus, another realm of beauty never to be apprehended with the senses. "O Mavis." But where did that come from, she had so severely kept Mavis out of it; Mavis as her way was, must somehow just have drifted in, like London fog silently insinuated herself. "O Mavis," Raymonde was actually now plunged head on into it.

Ermentrude Solomon, after various sidetrackings had actually got her in, was herself face on, was about to plunge down, down this precipice that was the boundary of a forbidden land, the land from which all afternoon Raymonde with precise patience and exquisite determination had just not kept her out of. "O Mavis—" It might have been Mavis saying it. Raymonde prolonged the blurred-over furry syllables, as if the very name must bear some poison of protection. Raymonde must protect herself now with Mavis or the very word "Mavis" would explode, small poisonous grenade, poisoning her room, her reason and her straight surroundings. Unless Raymonde used Mavis now adequately for her "protection," Mavis must undo her. "O Mavis Landour," she repeated it, as if there was, could ever have been or could ever be another. She said "Mavis Landour" as if she had only just associated the name with the person it was meant for and as if the very name Mavis might be applied, like Doris, like Dorothy to every other one of their outlying barrage of acquaintances. "O Mavis Landour. Quaint women. People always do misread her."

Raymonde Ransome said that, "people always do misread her," for it wasn't (was it?) up to her after all these years, centuries as her thought measured it (for weren't all these post-war years to their generation just so many unfamiliar and un-landmarked centuries?) it wasn't up to her, having been determinedly poised and decent (it was part of her panache, her not quite diminished glory) about Mavis, now to desecrate not so much Mavis as her own pride in her own attitude. "O Mavis Landour. Yes, what do you make of her?" knowing entirely (She had heard the whole story two hours ago in all its sordid finality from Marion) what it was, it must be, that Ermentrude was thinking. "You think I'm like her?" Purposely Raymonde put into the question just that perilous underdrawl of affectation, of appeal that must once have, also cleverly, taken in poor Hampstead Ermy. "People use to say so." She wasn't going to enter into any straight-on combat with this Jewess. She was going to measure, probe the under-layers, find out indirectly all about it. She wasn't going to say outright, "yes, I'm with you. Marion told me all about it." She wasn't going to decry Mavis (had she ever?) to this Jewess. She would let Ermy make the first move. It was always (so custom or superstition had it) the duellist who first moved and was finally defeated. Raymonde saw Ermentrude stark and tall in the shadow, take her and measure, Measure with critical and not uncalculating eye, her own distance. The Jewess she could see, was canny. It was really Ermy suspecting her own peril, who now bluntly challenged Raymonde with—"Marion told me." "Marion told me"

left an oddly indifferent lang[u]orous Raymonde tingling with apprehension, with subconscious terror that she would have to talk, speak further, name somehow that long (to strangers) unnamed Freddie. It seemed that Raymonde shivering unexpectedly off-guard, needed even Mavis now, small poisonous grenade to help her. "Told you?" Raymonde knew exactly what it was that Marion had told Ermy. It was indiscreet of Ermentrude so soon to give away a trump card. It was a little indiscreet of Marion so suddenly to have revealed it. "You don't mind?" Raymonde did mind, did terribly and unforgivably mind. This was her unexpected pang, the unexpected breach in her armour. She didn't mind. She minded awfully that Marion should have told Ermy. (It must have been quite lately.) She could hear Marion telling it to Ermy. "She told me actually after all these years that Mavis—" she couldn't, now watching the other in the half-lights, even phrase that sentence. Her pride so far sustained her. Her pride so far helped her. She didn't know (now considering Ermy) how she had ever so far broken before Marion. Staunch, good, clever and successful, there was a quality of staunchness about Marion that had quite un-nerved her. One day it had un-nerved her. But Marion shouldn't have told Ermy. She should never have told Ermy what she Raymonde had so far concealed; "Marion. Yes. People *are* right. I never told you, never told anyone. But Freddie was another."

It was Jewess Ermy who now had her. Ermy taking, so to speak, a side attitude, a side approach, was as clever in her own line as she Raymonde thought she had been. But Raymonde was never clever. Ray Bart saw to it. Always at a moment of peace, of anodine drift and of surcease from any real decision Ray Bart had her. Ermy fought one handed, with one weapon. It was Raymonde's weakness (sometimes her questionable strength) that she held two. But one at a time. One at a time, Ermy. How dared you so out with it? How dared you so refer to it? She wanted to cry out now to Ermy, "but Marion had no business." She wanted to face Marion with it, Marion so staunch, so assured, so decent, so inviolably loyal, "but why Marion *did* you tell her?" She said to Ermy as if it didn't matter, as if the matter in question was no more than the name of new magazine that might print something or a shop in Bond Street where they really got your hair right, "Marion told you?"

She need not ask what Marion had told her, had told Ermentrude, a Hampstead Jewess whom she only just knew and had only half invited. "Marion told you. Do you mind my asking *why*—Marion told you?"

IV

But now somehow it didn't seem to matter why exactly Marion had told Ermy and anyhow the first false sally was somehow already forgotten, fused in a medley of odd and unmeaning out-thrusts from poor Ermy who seemed now not so much to be measuring Raymonde (not in the least even to have realised that she had so dexterously made her touché) as to be battling at random, somehow with bare, bruised hands in the very air before her. Battling at something she couldn't conceivably see, beating away at something in the air before her that had not even yet materialized itself, that was a vague Frankenstein, a creature half-formulated and for that very reason the more straightly dangerous. Poor Ermy having made her neat touché, forgot it straightaway and poured out (the very flood-gate was now opened) the whole prodigious story. It was a vague monster that rose from all her ramblings; it rose with fresh diabolic head to regard with fresh unscathed eyes this helpless Ermy, who persistently cut off hydra-head on head to watch another leering at her. "How *could* she? *Why* did she," was the eternally recurrent leit-motif and the eternally recurrent wail into a room shadowing her odd form, her hunched and solitary degradation. It seemed over and over too (this is especial hydra-head occurred most frequently) that none of it would have (Martin had said) happened if once when they two were standing alone in the big hall Mavis had not *looked* at him. Martin said he saw what she was, understood (this recurrent hydra) when she looked at him. She "loo-oo-ked" (it appeared) "Mavis loo-oo-ked at Martin."

Raymonde had been all the while keeping up her little fiction that she was the other party to a dialogue which in all faith, had been barely nominally that. It was by means of an occasional nicely timed "O" and "really but do you think so" and "but it can't be can it" that Raymonde maintained her fiction. She thought she had arrived somewhere, had finally found her way out of the amazing labyrinth, this dialogue (which her occasional "O" and "so" just made that) when Ermy again stated, "he said that he would never so much as have seen her if she hadn't—" "She hadn't?" But it was the same old hydra, "looked at him."

There was no real reason why Raymonde rising, pulling herself, so to speak, out of the layer on layer of drift and drug of obliterating nothings of the afternoon spent all so profitless and all so full of drug and drift of the anodine of London, to remark simply, "how do you mean, *looked* at her" for she knew even better than Ermy knew what Ermy meant. There was no use; she finally

did pull herself away, like a crane from deep entangling reeds that was her nest in this corner of this sea and river drift and float and let-anything-happen-as-it-will-for-it-will-always-happen that was her vague yet so clearly defined and definite attitude toward London. She pulled herself, so to speak, out of her comfortable reed and river obliteration, and quite humanely stretched, stopped to find the matches in a crevice of the couch cover, found them, struck one, lit the first of the row (above the fire-place) of uneven half-burnt-out candles. Raymonde didn't have to listen to Ermentrude though she did so fascinated. She seemed to be hearing something from the other end of a sort of psychic gramophone or wireless, that had power of recording the exact past. Raymonde seemed, listening, to be hearing something that she had often heard in her own consciousness but never listened to. "How do you mean Ermentrude," she asked this formally, it was part of her Socratic make-up, "you're so vague with it; how do you mean he looked or she looked or whatever it was and how could that have made the difference?"

She faced Ermentrude with it, standing, for uncanny and in a distance she saw the whole scene as Ermentrude had so blunderingly yet so graphically described it. She saw Ermentrude standing in the country house party bed-room (this was among the details) and Mavis standing by her and Ermentrude, in her young gold and amber, looking with satisfaction in a mirror at another Ermentrude. Raymonde saw Ermentrude not as sitting hunched and despairing in her armchair but as standing light and gold and imbued with some quality of the long-past. Ermentrude belonged to the far, far past and out of the far, far past an Egyptian queen had stepped, was sitting in her little study boudoir. Raymonde regarded an odd figure that was an actress, that was more than that. Ermentrude was some sort of witch, some mage, some clairvoyant who had power as well to let others see what she so oddly must be seeing. It seemed no more odd to Raymonde Ransome that she should be seeing back to just ten years ago, than to be seeing (as she seemed about to do) into some past Egyptian's odd and sorry history. Layer and layer of pain, of odd obliteration had forbidden Raymonde Ransome to see into the past that to her was further than an Egyptian's coffin. The past of somewhere about 1917. It was Ermy who had done it. It was Ermy who was so devast[at]ingly doing it. Raymonde said, "I see what you mean Ermentrude. She said you were young and I do understand. She flattered you, got you off guard, then fascinated Martin. I'm sorry it's all happened." But why commit herself further? She looked at that distant house-party

Ermentrude so blunderingly and so graphically described with the Socratic assistance of her own precisely timed, “O-s” and “do you think so-s?” She saw Ermentrude gazing at herself all young and satisfied and she saw Mavis making herself out older than she was (though she was not young). “And she said she loved me,” this also recurrent hydra, “she said she loved *me*.” Raymonde had heard just that. So many times, Mavis had said to her in that long pre-Egyptian past of 1917, “you’re so young, so alluring. I don’t see how anyone can help loving you.” Raymonde heard the under-current, the low purr of Mavis through the rather common heavy speech of Ermentrude. She heard, hearing Ermy (this was the irony of it), Mavis.

Raymonde Ransom didn’t want to hear Mavis Landour. She didn’t want to see her, save for one or two little formal occasions, she hadn’t so much as seen her a dozen times in half as many years. It was always a vague *arrière-pensée* that made her cordial, made her overdo her cordiality with Mavis. It was part of her pride, her panache, her not quite diminished glory that she should say, for example to distinctly ageing pretty pre-war Lily Mount, “yes, Mavis, she grows younger, doesn’t she, each season?” It was part of her pride, part perhaps (she now reconsidered) of her own protection that she had so used Mavis. Mavis a small hand-grenade. The mention of that name “Mavis” was a small hand-grenade that would protect any so timorous as to produce it in any circle. “O Mavis. She grows younger.” Raymonde Ransome had made that part of her London armour, part of her self-preservation. Part if they only knew it of her not quite diminished glory. For it would have been so easy to read rightly any little outburst of petty spite, as feminine sheer cat. Any such outburst would have been, O so justly, interpreted by anyone, by Lily, to mean simply, “you see, my dear, I said so from the first. It was Mavis that he cared for.” Doubts, indecisions, morbid self-obliterations and maudlin self-belittlings (all that suffering of the high-strung, over intellectualised) were for ever satisfied in Raymonde. Long ago. Far and far and far as far as a buried Egyptian’s neatly painted coffin, as far even as 1917. It was settled then forever. It was Settled then forever. Feet—feet—feet—feet—Or was it a heart beating? There seemed to be a succession of muffled treadings, of slidings, of slitherings even as she looked at Ermy. It was not Ermentrude that Raymonde saw, not the Ermentrude seeing herself in a mirror in a pretty bed room at the Landour’s. It was not Ermy that faced her in her own room. It was Raymonde:

V

Raymonde could not define her feeling for London. But if she defined Raymonde she must do that. Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—Somewhere a nurse was saying, “she hasn’t much grit. These Americans are all—” (she had thought poor Raymonde was well out of it gone under the anaesthetic but she hadn’t) “*Germans*.” Raymonde could never define outright her feeling for this London. There was another voice. “She has had a hard bout; too much—too much—” but what it was that was too much, remained, must forever remain one with this nebulous quality that she could never quite define that she called London. A voice that said with an arrant hardness, a shrill hard-as-nails cruelty, “no grit”—another voice far and far and far and far of an insuperable delicacy, an undercurrent of masculine sympathy, a sternness, an inviolable rectitude, a strength, the very timbre all somehow entangled in the not-pain that was her sudden release, her escape from herself and a dragging recurrent slashing that was death (Euripides had said so on the battlefield) not once only but many recurrent, definite death-wounds in twenty four hours. There were two voices, “no grit—an *American*” and another—another—“too high-strung. Making a good fight—” Another voice. God might have spoken with it. Another voice and annihilating blackness. But Raymonde facing Ermy (forced by the same token to face Raymonde) couldn’t tell her just that. From far and far and far—the odd over-consciousness that comes with pain annihilated. Was London that? Pain and the odd over-consciousness that comes with annihilated pain? Vision that comes to the Eastern devote with his self-inflicted torture—*that* had been her uncanny share of London. Vision that comes with over-pain annihilated. (Though her pain had not been self-inflicted.) From far and far and far. Tangled with all that, the other nurses asking, interested, had she been disappointed, it was a girl anyhow, as if it being “a girl anyhow” (were they Chinese simply?) made up for all that and Mavis purring in and out and around, somehow by her very presence propitiating these odd creatures that it appeared were nurses who had come—who had looked—until after some super-horror the matron finally descended and—annihilating blackness. London was all that. Mavis was all that. Mavis would remain a highly coloured thread through all that darkness. “Let me bring Guildford?” Mavis’ Guildford came to see her. Then another smart person with a single eye-glass had accompanied Mavis. Ermy couldn’t see all that past social life with its gracious connotations. Ermy couldn’t know it. It was too late. Ermy was in a world of conscious pain. She had not escaped

through super-pain into the nebulous Nirvana—that was London. London. “Do you think I’m like Mavis?” Raymonde must come back to Ermy. Ermy who had so drastically made her face poor Raymonde. Raymonde must come back—come back—“Do you think, Ermy, that I’m like her?” For what did Ermy matter, what did Mavis matter, what did the young man who—didn’t-matter matter beside another, a voice of insuperable gallantry, of insuperable delicacy, “we’re all so sorry Mrs Ransome for your disappointment.” He was sorry. Who else had been? Had anyone else ever been? Freddie it almost seemed was already out of it. No one else—cared. A doctor had cared. He had seen it. He had said, “I’m sorry. Mrs Ransome, it was a beautiful little—body—” He had said that. From far and far and far, the very fibre of being must claim fealty to London. To a London doctor who had said that, “I’m sorry, we’re all, Mrs Ransome, sorry for your disappointment.”

London, London, London. London was that. Two layers of people. The worst. The very best. The most cruel, the most tender and subtly apprehensive. London was that. Let Mavis remain, as she was, part of London. What anyhow was Ermy, odd eastern Jewess? Ermy was outside (for all she had been born in Hampstead) had not really had her fire of initiation to this blurred peace that was Nirvana, that was London. Ermy didn’t matter. If Raymonde was like Mavis, Raymonde was like London. “My husband used to say I was somewhat,” Raymonde came now straight to Freddie whom she had not really mentioned. “Freddie. My husband.” Husbands. Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet— “Do you think so? Do or don’t you think I am like Mavis?”

For almost purposely she must now tease Ermy with it. Ermy who should have at least made her gallant gesture, who with, all her thin attenuated fibre should have made her gallant riposte to Mavis. Raymonde regarding Ermy still so hopelessly hunched (Ermy disregarding any rule of gallant fine indifference) wanted now to prod her. Wanted now to make her assert her independence. Not so wide as a church nor so deep as a barn door—but ’twill serve. Not so wide as a barn. Make a joke about it. Make a joke about it. (And she did look like a broken young Mercutio.) A joke at just such a moment would relieve tension. That was the primary *raison-d’être* of any joke. Who anyhow had the right so to drain all sympathy, as Jews would do. Vamping and getting sympathy. Her own case was different, was much greater against Mavis, but was it up to her, was it up to Raymonde after years (ten really?) of sustained gallant remote indifference to poor Mavis, now to rend her? “My dear girl. You have nothing to complain of.

You told me anyhow fifty times you didn't really like him." "I didn't like him—I lo-ooved him." "Well then if you so loved him you should have had wit, intuition enough to know you couldn't do it, couldn't take him down to Eastacres." "She asked us. She said she would look after us. I never, never so much as saw Martin alone at ho-o-me." At home. At home. Ermy's Hampstead home. "Well then you should have realized—" "I did think I did. She said that she so loo-ooved *me*." And so on and so on. It would never end. Go on like that interminably and a blue hydrangea seemed to flame, a frail blue smoke-bush of smoke-blue flower. A blue hydrangea, disentangled itself from all the over-layer of blurred reminiscence that was Raymonde's formula for London. Nebulous reminiscence through which ran thread of all too vibrant colour. Colour. Blue, smoke-blue that was the oddest comment on the blue eyes that regarded her across it. The blue eyes of Mavis by some miracle just had not matched (like the subtle blend, on some rue d'Échelle spring model) the smoke-blue of the flowering bush. The blue of the hydrangea made a cloud against the wall, against the array of boxes and wadges of cotton padding on the white enam[e]lled dressing table opposite. The blue hydrangea. "After all, it was different with me." Raymonde heard her voice all detached, indifferent, for she was indifferent. What had it mattered? It had happened so long ago and didn't matter. How could it? There were feet—feet—feet—feet passing up Sloane Street. What in the face of that could Mavis, could she Raymonde matter? What even could "it" matter? Nothing could and nothing ever did. Ermy was mistaken. It couldn't matter that Mavis had so to speak "taken" Ermy's young-man-that-didn't-matter. "You see Freddie—" Freddie. Freddie. Raymonde heard even those syllables, those quaint syllables that she never by any chance now uttered. Freddie. Freddie. "I was so ill. I actually asked Mavis to look after Freddie, I was so ill. I asked her to look after Freddie." Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—"I asked her to look after Freddie." Raymonde heard her voice oddly going on and on and on. It would go on and on and on forever, it seemed, if she did not stop it. "I asked Mavis to look after Freddie." She went on and on and on, though now pulling herself to, going back she almost counted it, almost made her calculation, actually counted it, it was about five times she had said it. She had said about five times, "I was ill. I asked Mavis to look after Freddie." She realized in her mechanically conscious brain that she had said that with the remotest mechanical indifference about five times. It meant nothing. It numbed her to so say it. She had never (hardly) said it. She had never spoken of it

(O, to Marion.) She had asked Mavis to look after Freddie as she Raymonde was too ill even to see Freddie. "Freddie. I asked Mavis—" Raymonde stopped. Regarded the other who now sat upright. Ermy's eyes were wide and clear and burnt like fire. A fire like light behind clear amber burnt a clear flame in Raymonde's small dark blue and grey over-blurred interior. In the interior of her room, those eyes regarded, looked, flared as a cameo in a dark chamber flares when a match is put behind it. Ermy's face was like a cameo set against black velvet and from the clear hard face-outline two odd elongated semi-precious unnamed stones took fire, gave out light as if from within. Lit, lighted some area of Raymonde's sub-consciousness so that she too sat erect, went back, back. What just had she been saying? O this simply. "I seem to have asked you a dozen times and got no answer. Do or don't you think I am like Mavis?"

But there wasn't any answer to that. There wasn't any answer to anything. Whatever could it matter that she, Raymonde, was or wasn't like this Mavis? Whatever could it matter that she stung, that she prodded Ermy with it?

There were feet, feet, feet, feet, feet outside in Sloane Street. They were going to Victoria. "This way Miss for the troop trains. This way Madame" (they had seen Freddie) "for the trains." There were feet, feet, feet passing up Sloane Street to Victoria. London had forgotten, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Ermy had forgotten. Ermy must forget. That was why Ermy was constantly seeking, constantly groping. (Yet was it necessary of Mavis to "take" that one, that one young man that had just mattered?) There were feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Ermy wouldn't forget. She hadn't. Her eyes were clear. Her eyebrows were level. There was all of captivity, of the shrewd arraignment of a captive, of a lost race. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Raymonde was like that. She was of a lost race. Steel as it were flashed across her. It was Ermy speaking. "You mean she took your husband while that—happened?"

Ermy had put it straight. A sword flashing steel (Ermy for the first time, attained the true Mercutio) through mesh and silken mesh of her own doubts, of her own self-obliterations. Yes, Mavis had taken Freddie. Raymonde admitted this now clearly in her conscious mind for almost the first time in half a dozen years. Yes, Mavis had taken Freddie. But old persistent habit still clung to her, old doubt and self-obliterating lack of self-appraisal, "I after all, asked her to." Asked her to? Had she?

Had she asked her to? Had Raymonde asked Mavis so to speak to "take" as they say, Freddie? Raymonde had spoken

to Mavis, had (after her relapse) written Mavis. "Look after Freddie. Freddie is due on leave. Look after Freddie." Mavis might even have shown that letter (no doubt she did) when poor Dwight Thompson actually approached her with it. It was all very well to say that Dwight was—odd. He was to that extent. He was odd to the extent that he adored Freddie, adored Raymonde and actually had had the temerity to approach Mavis with it. He had approached Mavis in the open (who else ever had?) and with open candour. Raymonde recalled his very words; "I said Mavis this won't do. It's an ugly tangle. Suppose Fred doesn't come back. You'll blight all her afterwards—" and he had added, "I put it in that way because that Beardsley cat, old Lily Mount, had spotted them." Lily had from the beginning made her own independent conclusions. "Of course, Raymonde adores Mavis." What was there for Raymonde to do but to riposte, "O Mavis she grows younger," for any little back-fire of spite would have been, O so rightly, interpreted by Lily. Long habit even now held. "I mean, Ermentrude, I did give her a loop hole." Long habit now held and the old slash that poor odd Dwight had given her; "she said it was for you. All of it. She said she *prostituted*—her own word—herself for you."

The web and web and web and web that was eternal. A twilight of the spirit. Right was not right. Then was wrong, wrong? O Ermentrude don't stare and stare in the light of uneven wavering candles. What was your humiliation to mine? But mine didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Nothing ever could matter. Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. There was no understanding among the living, no loyalty, no steadfastness of purpose. Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. Among the dead there were shrines, finality, obliteration. "Ermy don't take it that way. Dear child it was all so nothing."

She said, "dear child, it was all so nothing" for it all was somehow. It was all nothing in the face of this thing—That feet, feet, feet should have passed up Sloane Street gaily to Victoria and that no one any more (had they ever?) cared. No one any more cared and feet, feet, feet, feet, feet stood the other side of a chasm across which (she had only to let go) she herself could cross and join them. Was this worth it? Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Was even London worth it? Drug and drift of obliteration. Drift and anodine. Raymonde, said to Ermy, "I want to stay here. You go on to Florence. I think I won't this year risk going abroad at all."

She must come back to the original purport of the visit. Ermentrude Solomon had come blatantly for introductions.

for anything, she could conceivably get. She would probably want the Baedeker but she shouldn't have it. Why shouldn't she have it? Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. There was no good in any of it. No good in sacrifice. The only good there was, the only god (here she became one with Mavis) was a frail embodiment, with chiffon under-garments and acqua-marines at throat and ear-lobes.

An odd embodiment rose to greet Raymonde gazing at Ermy in the uneven flickering of odd candles (that third one would soon go out) and the odd embodiment, though it seemed to wear the very frail acqua-marine green-blue of Mavis' affectation, was very clearly Raymonde. "Do come, there will be five of us without you. One extra makes all the difference." She heard the words, the fluttering invitation. So she was to be the extra at some shady gathering and after bridge—O they knew all what. She knew all that. It was easier to stay away than to go. Simply from ennui, not from virtue. She had protested (she still protested) that it was not virtue that made her shun the obvious. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. It was not virtue that made her stay cooped up in her tiny flat grubbing at odd manuscripts when she might go to "parties." It was not virtue she persisted. Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. "Remember Ermy, it wasn't, it never has been up to me to judge her." Why did she say that? Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Judge not. They were all dead. If Freddie had a little loved Mavis. Then it was up to Raymonde—Feet, feet, feet, feet. She had been perversely loyal. She had been desperately anxious to appear more than loyal. Lily Mount in her red cardinal gown had made a point of so openly sneering at her. "*You*, Raymonde, everyone knows *you* so adore Mavis." Everyone knows, everyone knows. But they didn't know, they had never known, nor cared. They had never known. "This way Miss for the troop-trains. This way Madame" (they had seen Freddie) "for the trains."

"O take the Baedeker." What was the use of it all? There had been no use, there was no reason. Why not let Ermy take the Baedeker? Did it matter that Freddie had scrawled little scholarly dates and made painful little calculations at the last, scrawled over the fine print, made notes of *Vino Hadriano* or whatever it happened to be, even more serious notes for essays, odd cryptic script, odd, disjointed tangle of notes here and there blurring the margins for essays he had never written? Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. It was no good. Mavis had so blighted it. There was no memory, no beauty, no affection. "Do take this old Baedeker. Though it's no earthly use now. Everything's altered horribly."

VI

Everything's altered horribly. That was the crux of the whole dreary matter. Everything had so horribly altered and there were new ways of looking at things and Raymonde and her like were centuries apart (who of her generation wasn't?) from the young people who weren't, all in all, so very much younger than they were. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. There was no use going on. Everything in life was blighted, still-born—that was the crux of the matter. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. They were a still-born generation.

Nevertheless it was odd, somehow lacking in taste of Mavis so blatantly to have stolen Ermy's lover. "Did you really *want* him?" Raymonde came back to Ermy's young man who seemed all along so negligible. He seemed, now she openly spoke of him, more than ever negligible—it seemed a vaporous emanation not really a young man had been taken by Mavis. For it was not any defined image of any young man that stood out against the rather dim and, complicated back-ground of all poor Mavis' (in spite of Sevres candlesticks, Ven[e]tian colored glass dishes and the full-rigged porcelain ship riding bluer porcelain waves at the turn of the twisted staircase) rather dreary setting. It was not the young man in tennis flannels Ermy had been colourlessly (in spite of all her extravagance of detail) conjuring, or the young man suitably garbed or suitably ungarbed (almost too suitably tall and clean and naked) in the river; it was not the young man with or without clothes in the background of Mavis' little boudoir that Raymonde saw as she watched Ermy in the flickering of uneven candles (the third now actually had gone.) It was not the young man that Raymonde was seeing nor any young man; it was the three of them, three women, no young men at all. Mavis, Ermentrude and somehow herself; oddly intruding. Raymonde had gazed at Ermy, awaiting some solution of the long since acceptedly indissoluble problem of Mavis and it was her own eyes that answered her, herself curiously (it was not Ermentrude who was unwelcome) uninvited to her own tea-table. It was Raymonde (instead of the negligible young man) who emerged along with Mavis and with Ermy.

But Raymonde bringing herself conscientiously to heel, now sternly determined to see the young man in all his attributes of young maturity. She purposely now came back to him though the matter of the Baedeker seemed to weigh much heavier. All her life was disproportionate (feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—). She was sure she would be more interested in a new bath-salt than in any exposition anyone could give her of anyone else's fresh

and ingenuous young lover. But Raymonde must come back to it, to him. She was getting too out of touch with life altogether; she purposely came back for this lop-sided exposition brought out, kept bringing out, not Ermy, not so much even poor maligned Mavis but herself, Raymonde, who gazed at her and gazed at her from the highly polished surface that was Ermy. Ermy (a highly refined surface) collected, concentrated, gave her back a self that she had so long let drift under drug and anodine of London. Ermy gave her not so much Ermy or Mavis as sheer Raymonde. Frighteningly, in avid clarity, Ermy gave her Raymonde and so clear did that Raymonde seem that again Raymonde turned (changing sides, changing now the angle of her observance with almost every heart-beat) against Raymonde. In a second, Raymonde didn't want so to contemplate undiluted Raymonde. She wanted to see other things. Now even the young man. She hazarded an obvious query. "Then Ermy, he *is* handsome?" she asked Ermy. She must draw out Ermy on the subject of the young man though she didn't fundamentally care about him, wanted to drift and drift. It was only that Ermy's odd power of conjuring up absent figures had made her face this other not so colourless projection. A Raymonde of long ago. Raymonde facing straight on that past Raymonde now wanted to forget her. Facing Raymonde she wanted to forget her. Raymonde repeated, "then he's charming, clever, all these things?" How odd that she should have even now no image of the obvious, so graphically described young man. Ostensibly they had been talking of him. All afternoon. Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—What nowadays *did* young men look like?

"O horrid, horrid," was Ermy's unexpected comment. "Horrid?" "I mean now. I don't want to think about him, about Martin." "You told me he was clever." Had she? Well, she might have. Something or other had been said, by someone. Maybe Marion. "He is clever?" "O, he was." "Was?" "I mean before she got her claws on him." "How could her claws alter Martin's intellect?" "O that's just it. We talk of mind as if it were outside, were something nothing could change. We're all wrong. He has, changed." "Perhaps she'll waken him, give him some illumination, inspiration." Raymonde now wickedly prolonged it, wickedly pursing her mouth up as she rose from the divan, making the detour of Ermy's giant-armchair to search further in the little low desk that was crowded into the narrow space between the mantle and the heavy curtained window. "I keep my candles in my desk drawer. These desks nowadays are very useful." Candles, desk drawers. Illumination, inspiration, feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Freddie.

Who had changed him? Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Raymonde now recognised all of her old stability, her old not-quite-diminished glory as, a meaner not so rare quality of just sheer feline caution. She had been too proud. Unlike Ermy she had not arraigned poor Mavis. Raymonde had been too proud to admit that Freddie had so altered. If she said to herself even then that Mavis had so changed him, she had recognised his weakness, and hers for so championing him. Freddie was weak or he couldn't so have altered. It was not Mavis. It was Freddie's fundamental weakness. It was not Mavis' fault. It was not Mavis' fault (by the same infallible logic) with Martin. It was Martin who was weak or else how could Mavis change him. Ermy had turned a sword in Raymonde, wedged a sword (albeit it was half unconsciously) earlier in the afternoon, neatly into a breach of gashed and jagged armour. Early in the afternoon; "Marion told me." Marion told her. Raymonde now somewhat late but none the less unerringly riposted, "well I mean is he really capable of any true creation? If he is, then how can Mavis change him?"

But the chief difficulty with Ermy was that she didn't seem to know when she hurt any more than when she was hurt. She weltered simply. She had no defined attitude toward the giving and receiving of blows. Looking all the crumpled, young Mercutio, she should have stuttered out her "not so wide as a barn-door" but she didn't. To Raymonde's "how can Mavis change him," Ermy simply answered, wailing, wallowing, feminine, in ghetto abandonment, "but she has. He would. He would have done something. I didn't want to spoil him. He was too young. He was too young for me but Mavis simply took him. She has spoiled him. See if he ever does now any good work. He was just beginning. He used to work at the desk she gave him in the little terrace room at Eastacres, early, late, all day. I helped him. That's how I found out." "Found out?" "You said just now you keep queer things in desks. She seemed to."

It was to be a new detour, a side-tracking in the already hopelessly involved long story, Raymonde judged by the gasp and sudden pause in Ermy's high staccato. Short, crisp, to the point, Ermy's high staccato went on, went on, went on—then stopped as suddenly as if she sensed Raymonde's slight indifference, her attention wandering elsewhere. Raymonde said, "I'll just change these candles. Shall we have fresh tea?" But Ermy didn't answer. Ermy didn't answer. Raymonde thought now she had perhaps stopped suddenly and for good, just wound down. But she hadn't.

She began again, as suddenly, as unexpectedly as she had stopped, just went on, went on, not changing her position, speaking as if Raymonde were there opposite. Hearing herself, so to speak, addressed from the front when she was absolutely back of Ermy's armchair (Raymonde having made that turn to get the candles) Raymonde had an uncanny sensation that she (Raymonde) wasn't there at all, was somehow disembodied, wandering behind the chair and that Ermy was addressing a ghost, something that never could any more be. That could not be.

Ermy was addressing, a Raymonde of human quality, of some fine discriminations which Raymonde was not. "One can't nowadays let people worry one. They're funny. But nothing can disturb one." Disturbance went long ago. It was drift now and obliteration—feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. *This way Miss, this way Miss*—"O that's how it happened." Raymonde half unconsciously like a trained actress was throwing out her Socratic "O-s" again, her precisely timed, "that's how it happened-s." "O, it happened that way—" (it was a matter of habit now) for Ermy had just said that Mavis had especially asked her to run the dogs down to the fish-pond as she had a headache and Martin had protested he must finish his last article. Ermy rushing back unexpectedly (as they might have known she would do) with a spray of wild-flower for Martin had met Mavis. In her dressing gown coming out, almost out—all the rest of it saying, "my smelling salts. I hated to disturb Martin—in the old desk." Raymonde registered the question that Ermy kept repeating, "but why smelling-salts in an old desk? Why, why?" but it meant nothing. The thing that bewildered her was not the so-obvious tale itself and its inevitable denouement as the fact that Ermy should be telling it to her, to a Raymonde who wasn't there at all, who wasn't sitting opposite. To a creature of flesh and blood, a creature of justice and of right discrimination which she was not. She deliberately walked from behind the chair and seated herself now opposite. She sat deliberate and a little cynically stoically upright, determined that Ermy should not call on her for flesh and blood, for peace and sympathy, for hope, for security. Feet, feet, feet, feet—she belonged to another world, another generation and Ermy by her curious openness to humiliation, to degradation, to sheer pitiful deception proved that she (for all of Leonard) fought for this one. Ermy still fought for a place in life, in a social scheme that couldn't now exist. Ermy still cried, "but how *could* she? But *why* did she?" Why shouldn't Mavis? Mavis had as much a right as any of them to her drug, her drift (even if it happened to belong to another strata, another realm of feeling) as had Raymonde. "Well, but *did* she?"

Raymonde now deliberately pointed her already neatly searing steel at Ermy's singular and bewildering open sorrow. "*Did* she trick him? Wasn't it perhaps she who frankly sought her?"

Ermy should have accepted the whole matter. Long ago, Ermy should have accepted it. There were for her and Ermy no looking backs, there were no *arrière-pensées* (or there should be none.) Ermy was not so much adoring this young Martin (and for all her later rather florid picture of him, still Raymonde could not see him) as setting up another Leonard. It was not, could not have been just that young man she wanted. Ermy was refusing to accept the predicament. That for her and such as her, London was a foggy Limbo and one's only hope was to be drowned out in it. One's only hope was drift and obliteration. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Mavis was right. Ermy was too smug, too secure, too wrapped in her own importance. What could such things matter? Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. Their generation should have long ago accepted it. That there was no hope, could be no manner of changing. Look back, Ermy, and choose between Limbo where we are or that salt pillar, Lot's wife. Ermy, it was not Martin that you longed for but just Leonard. "*Did* she trick you?" Raymonde turned her poisoned bard for the sheer pleasure of watching Ermy squirm. She, Raymonde, understood Mavis; Mavis standing, as Ermy said she had before the mirror. Mavis saying, "but you're so beautiful. No one would ever look at *me* afterwards." Putting Ermy off guard, deliberately making herself seem older, protective. Asking them to Eastacres and then blighting her. "Wasn't it perhaps he who frankly sought her?"

Raymonde felt herself go hard with a little click. She, felt herself, in one second, neatly encased in a neat little steel costume, not armour so much as something neatly falling, looking devastatingly simple and water-cool but not water-cool nor water-texture. All suave and smooth and turning, as a river-creature, to each mood of each new caller, Raymonde knew her movements. All slim and indecisive and malleable, Raymonde had her sudden swift decisions and her sudden hardening. Water-cool, slim and tenuous, easy to turn and change to the very thought of any chance acquaintance, she could occasionally go steel and arid. Cold and cruel. Calculating as any Hampstead Jewess. She felt this, felt that Ermy was not realizing it, could not realize so swift and artful a decision in one so malleable. "I mean didn't he perhaps absolutely from the first 'fall,' as they say for her?" Raymonde questioned. It was not Ermy so much that she was thinking of. Hard and cruel. It was not really Ermy she was steel against. It was Raymonde.

For beyond the Ermy gazing in a mirror Raymonde saw as in some odd composite picture, just that other, just herself of some ten years ago (was it as long as that?) young and frail and tenuous and a Mavis, an exact replica of this other only younger (was it only ten years ago?) all sophisticated charm, "but darling—anyone with *your* beauty—" Where was it? The exact instance and Mavis' exact wording of the sentence escaped her. But she Raymonde with her uncanny precise memory, recalled the absolute mood of security that she had then been put to. Raymonde too had then accepted Mavis' calculated effect. A Mavis older than that Raymonde, protecting. "Mavis. Won't you look after Freddie?" Who else, so capable, so charming, so infinitely loyal? It was not really Ermentrude that Raymonde so neatly steeled her heart to. It was Raymonde.

VII

Raymonde steeled herself to Raymonde. Raymonde steeled herself to meet the encounter of those astonishing eyes that had so suddenly frozen in a face that had been part and parcel of the blurred hunched figure in the arm-chair. Raymonde steeled herself lest Ermy should again sit upright, should again demand outright, probing further (Ermy had been too involved in her own misery so far to pursue her first astonishing past inquiry, "you mean she took your husband while that—happened?") Raymonde steeled herself against Raymonde and against that momentarily hardened and alert and frozen Ermy. Drug and drift. Anodine and nebulous nirvana. Freddie—poor Freddie—Better stick to Mavis, to the past. To comfortable Limbo. Why comfort Ermy, Hampstead Jewess taking it all for granted? Raymonde said now straight to her (now let her have it) "I mean of course, Freddie adored Mavis, who could help it?" Ermentrude might think it all out now, quite clearly on her own. Let Ermy think Freddie had adored (and with frank Raymonde-cognizance, not with this Ermy-whining) Mavis.

"Yes" (it went over and over in her head "Marion told me") "I am glad Marion told you, for it just shows what power Mavis has. We must just accept Mavis. Don't be hard on her. She can't help it." Raymonde valiant against a Raymonde tall and tenuous and betrayed, steeled herself as well against this half-stranger, this Hampstead pseudo-actress. "Why—what *can* one do, if a woman is so wholly fascinating?" There was something still left of her panache, her not quite diminished glory; Raymonde was now elated with it, overdoing her (so far) successful pose of loyalty, of never a shadow of treacherous turning.

"Don't you see? It's the way too she dresses." This was blatantly again meant to wound Ermy in her quite wrong "county" costume. Ermy trying to be "county" in tweed coat and skirt and the wrong kind of hat and Mavis as Raymonde had so often seen her, all medieval charm and long ear-rings yet for all the tenuous slightly theatrical touches, somehow right, somehow not dowdy, always smart. Ermy might have thought all that out. "Don't you think so? Her clothes, I mean—marvellous."

Ermy somehow wasn't taken in by all this show of alert and cheery loyalty. Jews somehow weren't. Somehow Jews had a way of pulling up Raymonde Ransome, of seeing further, of going further. A look that Raymonde had seen before in certain appraising art dealers, in certain Oriental merchants, crossed the girl's face. Perhaps Ermentrude wasn't for nothing, by trade, a somewhat accomplished not altogether recognised actress and by birth (for all of Hampstead) a daughter of the East. Ermy looked at Raymonde with a new slant, from another angle.

"O, I see it." Ermentrude said, "O, I see it" as if it were an odd missing piece of a tiresome puzzle she was seeing or the clue to some Abracadabra mystery, though what and where she was seeing, Raymonde hadn't the slightest notion.

"I see it absolutely. Martin would adore you."

It was somehow a shock to Raymonde to have this Martin introduced into a picture where somehow no men were. In Limbo, this post-war Limbo there were no young men. What did they look like, young men, for there assuredly *were* young men. Ermy had said so, Ermy kept on saying so. Ermy couldn't let by-gones be by-gones. She would drag things up, drag things back. She would insist on it. A young man in the picture put it all out of key, the whole perspective altered. The pictures as Raymonde saw it (still holding on, still determined to retain some of the aura of its beauty) as a veiled Botticelli and the background of refined animality there was lighted, lit as from within, glowing, strange with potent spirituality. The background of her past that she looked at through the veil of her self-obliteration, of her loyalties, was soft and dim and she saw things through a veil, distant, remote, removed. It was easy, had been easy to say to Lily Mount, to anyone, "but Mavis—*she* grows younger." For the Mavis of to-day was not really in that picture, was not anyone who could so gently and so poisonously insinuate herself, so definitely blight that garden. Mavis couldn't take this. It was other, spiritually remote, veiled as that Botticelli, the very answer and redemption of the spiritual animality of the exquisite, somewhat over-flaxen Flora. Mavis couldn't take it. So sure was that world, so distant yet

so clear, so definite, so precise that no casual treachery could blight it. It was so personal a world that Mavis with all her years of tenuous probings had not even seen it. The actual centre of that world, like the pearl the sea-fish throws out, like the star ejected from the nebula, was small and precise. It became through years more precise as if with the years Raymonde had attained another gift of defined and clarified perspective. That world (behind the obvious dimmed pink pincushion roses and the obvious dimmed heavy shade of evergreens and the obvious slightly sentimental turn of the head of the flaxen transparence of the elongated limbs of Flora) was clear and stark. Behind the Botticelli there was another Botticelli. Behind London there was another London. It was just to keep that other London (that other Botticelli) that she had blinded them all, almost blinded herself by her attitude, her panache, her not quite diminished glory, her loyalty to a circle that she had never actually repudiated for she had never been actually of them. "Yes—Mavis grows younger. Yes, Lily, I do love your last book." Charm, the last of it, the last flowering, almost second flowering of the already over-flowered 1890's had been Raymonde's portion, her peculiar and unique inheritance. She had entered a pre-war London at the moment of its highest flowering. She was of that. But behind London there was another London. Of which Mavis and her like knew nothing.

Ermentrude, odd exile like herself, with caution of a transplanted race did know it, knew it or sensed it rather with some long-trained race intuition. Ermentrude knew all that though she was not able to concentrate her absolute but vaguely outlined knowledge into actual words. She could not say all that in actual direct speech, but she approached it intuitively, mysteriously, indirectly. She saw something but the way of her approach was obvious, crude. It was, somewhat of a shock to Raymonde when she heard it. "You're like her. But much more so. An original of some rather good copy." The old look, the art expert's appraisal. Ermy had it. "You *are* like her. Those people in that nursing-home were right. You might have been her sister. And I have it."

Again what Ermy had, or did not have became a matter of indifference to Raymonde, tired now somehow absolutely drained of strength, of interest in the whole sordid and over-worked obvious situation. She managed to get something of this as politely as she could into her speech for she asked Ermy somewhat pointedly if she couldn't after all get fresh tea. But the girl so far from taking this as a gentle reminder that the afternoon was over, spurted out as a last gasp towards, some (until this moment) insurmountable barrier which she now saw hope of conquering,

"I see it. You *are* like her. And with brain. That will do it."
 "O what, what Ermy?" Raymonde heard herself exclaim, disheartened, disinterested at last in the utter unfinality of everything, "do what Ermy?"

"Martin. You have only to look like that, to speak like that, to, in addition, flatter him (you can) about his new book (he has such an extravagant admiration for yours) and you'll have him." How was it possible to tell this impossible Ermy that she didn't want, wouldn't for any price take the young man even if he were (which he presumably wasn't) Ermy's young man, for the giving. "I can't see what you mean," she said and thought; "if you can't get him, could I?" And: "if she has got him, would I?" Question with obvious answer, too obvious even to put to obvious Ermy. But Ermy was blank, a tabula rasa. A keen face, eyes level, dark, dark eyes, those formidable brows. God—it came to Raymonde in a flash—how beautiful.

For Ermy was beautiful (there was no getting round it) with the beauty of some unearthed Queen Nefertiti. She was beautiful with a glamour that belongs only to antiquity and racially Ermy was a direct blood inheritor of all the things that intellectually she, Raymonde, was attuned to. Egypt, the Syrian desert. Raymonde sensed around the brow of the tall Jewess (almost visibly) a band of dark exquisite wine-purple hyacinths. She was shocked by a sudden transference of all her values. Ermy was not of to-day not even of yesterday, but of always and forever. This trivial situation might have happened anywhere. But was it trivial? Was it not she Raymonde who was trivial? Raymonde who sub-divided her world into Limbo and an aura. Both false. London was not Limbo. It was actual. It was to-day. It was the very-present. Ermy had so made it.

In the light of her discovery that a just unearthed Egyptian sat there or some tall and somewhat slightly scraggy Syrian, all her values altered. In flash Raymonde altered. But for all her vision, her actual and defined knowledge that Ermy wasn't just this Jewess Ermy she was shocked, recalled, recalled to her own age, her own race. her own dissimilarity. For how could she so lower her pride, her dignity, her so far not quite diminished glory by stooping to capture a young man she didn't want just for the sake of some twisted revenge? But was it twisted? Tenuous, malleable, wasn't it Raymonde with her odd un-European frankness, her would-be blessed straightness who was twisted? For what woman who is a woman, who has pride, dignity, position, love ever will let another so subtly undermine her. So wickedly to blight her. In the end to cast this last crass insult

(poor old Dwight has so reported it) "she said, it was for you—all of it. She said she *prostituted* herself—her own word—for you."

No, it wasn't good enough, it wasn't good enough. Ermy made her see that. Ermy by just that turn of her head, by just that odd un-European level gaze had made her see it. Ermy wasn't argumentative, if she had been, Raymonde would still be saying, "but her clothes—marvellous." If Ermy had gone on talking, gone on with the direct matter in hand, Raymonde would still be foiling with her, "but so pretty. What woman, man or child but must admit it?" Far and far and far another Raymonde danced forever young on a carpet of frail wind-flowers, of frail Tuscan wild tulips. From far and far and far Flora, with transparent draperies, spilled crocus, hyacinth, smaller unfamiliar herbs from South Italian meadows. Far and far and far and far—further than all that, another Raymonde (that other Raymonde's double) Ray Bart, held a gate-way to a city. Far and far and far and far. Further than transparent robes, than small pincushion pink roses. Further than the voices that almost audibly waft out from the Botticelli "Primavera." From and far and far and far, Ray Bart would always sleuth and trail and track her.

It was Ray Bart who always checkmated her. It was Ray Bart who caught her open-handed. It was Ray Bart who had acclaimed this Jewess. It was the poet, the young spearman who was Raymonde's genius. Ray Bart held a sword of pure steel and it was Ermy who recalled her.

VIII

But Raymonde still with the drift and obliteration of her past three months in London didn't want so to repudiate herself. Maybe Ray Bart the poet was a flaming white sword of the spirit. But who wants white swords nowadays and who wants spirit? Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. There was enough of the ghost world all about them. There was enough white marble and clear cut effigies. Raymonde wanted that other world of drift and obliteration and anyhow there were girls now, dozens of them with Joan of Arc hair cuts, wandering hatless, not seeming to mind anyone, up Sloane Street, even in Piccadilly. Hadn't she, Raymonde, as much a right to her inheritance as any, the inheritance of the drug and drift of the just pre-war of London's drift and over-flowering obliteration? Who was there that mattered or cared? Ray Bart a white spirit kept some stronghold of the Spirit, but there was this Raymonde that Ray Bart's few odd admirers did not count on; Raymonde was tenuous, Raymonde was obliterated, but Raymonde had that power, that still assertive quality; forever

and forever a Raymonde dwelt secure and tenuous and suave and slightly sentimental within a world of security, tenuous as the golden mist above the Arno. Raymonde was still secure and tenuous; who was Ray Bart to blight (with devastating spiritual passion) this inter-realm of flowering serenity? Far and far and far Raymonde saw "the light that never was," that always was, a clear autumn mist over the lily-city from which the lily tower of Giotto sprung like some rare exotic, into flower. Tall stalk of marble. The last word was spoken. The lily-tower had never been surpassed in beauty. In Florence the last word was spoken. From far and far and far; in Florence the last word was spoken; Mina de Fiesole, the Pico who wandered under flowering evergreens. The Platonic dialogue revitalized under the flowering citrons. Far and far and far. Who now loved stark and obliterating beauty? Beauty of another sort was all about her. The almost oriental beauty of peace, of self-effacement, of obliteration. "Yes, Ermy, you will love the 'Primavera,' it's all so obvious." Get away from anything so stark and defined as any judgement. Who was she, Raymonde, to judge Mavis, tenuous and obliterating? From far and far and far Raymonde saw it, saw it all, saw Ermy standing in her over-tall and ancient security. Raymonde saw Ermentrude who saw in a mirror Ermentrude. "By the way, Ermy. Tell me again about it. What exactly was it Mavis did say by that mirror?" Raymonde for about the twentieth time, returned now to this for of all the tangle of over-detail Ermy had spun, one picture stood most definite. It was symbolical almost. It was Ermy looking at Ermy and it was Mavis who stood and looked at Mavis in a mirror. It was Ermy facing Ermy and Mavis facing Ermy and Mavis. By some over-subtlety of sympathy, Raymonde seemed to see Ermy with Mavis' eyes, see Mavis with Ermy's and see each with her own covertly self-appraising glances. For Mavis did not confess openly that she saw herself as devastating; Mavis had, O so cleverly, made that certain. Raymonde questioned Ermy though she knew the answer, "didn't Mavis tell you she could never hope to rival you or words to some such purport?" And Ermy answered as Raymonde knew she would do, "Mavis said, 'I'm old, look, look at me, Ermy. I have this wicked greyness that I can only just keep down by constant treatments. I am so old beside you Ermy. How could anyone ever even so much as speak to me with you near?' She said all that." So Ermy now repeated it. Ermy had more or less repeated it all before. But each time Ermy told the story, some fine detail detached itself as one may detach some tiny delicately detailed shell or golden fruit from some over-worked Carlo Crivelli that at first seems a blur of too extraneous detail.

For Raymonde did not see Ermy this time at all. She passed by the familiar central figure all golden and secure in its clarid beauty. She saw now the secondary figure and it became (as figures will do in the most familiar picture) suddenly interesting in strange unexpected unfamiliarity. Far and far and far by some over-subtlety, Raymonde saw just Mavis. She saw Mavis seeing another and another and another Mavis than the one she frankly (seeming then to poor Ermy, rather pitiful) decried there in the mirror. Mavis was secure with another series of reflection. Behind Mavis they stretched, all the others, all the other Mavis-incarnations. Not of the far, eternal, static past. Raymonde only saw them of the present or of the far, far ever so much more distant past than just unearthed Queen Nefertiti. Raymonde saw Mavis as far and far and far, as far even as that devastating distant decade (O ever so much further than any sheer young classicism) circa 1917. Mavis must remain of that very distant period. People “did” things in those days. Therefore Mavis “did” things. Mavis had not had the power to realize another series of standards, to re-sift her values. Mavis remained circa 1917. Mavis, Mavis and Mavis. Mavis changing from a jade-green tight-fitting costume with a small drum-shaped little hat oddly wreathed in green grapes, to another with no top to her gown and shoulder blades hunched forward in some pretty affectation while someone (was it always Guildford?) struggled to unfasten (at somebody’s party) a coat-sleeve button that had inexplicably tangled in the champagne-lace that was the incongruous loose long full sleeve of the elegant low-cut gown. Mavis and then Mavis and then Mavis came to look within that mirror. Mavis changed in character with each gown she wore but Ermentrude remained sheer changeless Ermentrude. “Just what were you then wearing?” Raymonde returned to present Ermentrude and their converse of that mirror and Ermentrude answered her, “O a sort of buff garden-smock thing and a big hat. I mean I carried it.” Raymonde saw that buff garden-smock and a slightly too weedy, over-tall creature that carried a hat, a garden hat. Raymonde was somehow implicated with that figure but it was not herself so to speak, that stood there facing herself. Raymonde did not so merge herself, her character with Ermy’s. It was simply as if Ermy were acting a part, was acting as understudy, as it were, to a part that she, Raymonde herself, had long and long forgotten. The words that she had said so long ago (circa 1917) Ermy had (circa this all too devastating present) just said. The inevitable answer that she had given Mavis sophisticated and appealing. Ermy must as inevitably have answered—

“What Ermy—exactly did you answer?”

"I said, looking at her (for you know what she said was true—she had a contrasting grey quarter inch, horrible, under her russet hair), 'but you never could be anything but lovely. Youth doesn't count in these days.' I said 'youth doesn't count in these days' and it doesn't." Why say to Ermy that it never did, never had? Raymonde had heard the same things from Mavis ten years ago (was it as long as that?) standing like Ermy young and unsuspecting. "Raymonde you are so lovely. So utterly charming. If now you could manage—" In those days Mavis had suggested face-creams, a special "vegetable" rouge that "won't hurt your skin in any way," new hair arrangements. A stubborn Raymonde had stuck to her quaint somewhat old-world American distinction. Mavis had not so far in the essentials ruined her. Raymonde had given way before more subtle overtures, the superficial glamour of a gown or so; the bunch of violets when she was depressed, always at the right moment, the little scent-bottle of that so-precious war-time Houbigant. Those little insinuating reminders that she Raymonde was a woman and should make the most (why shouldn't she?) of it. Raymonde came back to Ermy. "Then you told her" (meaning of course Mavis) "she was beautiful?" "O never as much as that. Simply that she had charm and wasn't ageing." Ermy saw one Mavis. But she had not seen Mavis upon Mavis. Like a Circe, Mavis had woven a web of deception before poor Ermy, woven a veil and in showing her ugliest side, got Ermy off guard. It was clever of her. It was clever of Mavis. If Mavis wanted the young man so much as all that (fancy so much wanting him) why shouldn't she then have him? Drift and drift and drift and the annihilating glamour. Let her then just have him. "Ermy. I must write those introductions."

For Ermy must go home now. Raymonde was tired of Ermy. Give her those introductions that she wanted, that she had frankly come for and there could be no further loitering. From far and far and far, Ermy had brought to life (with her odd conjecturer's ability) a series of people that Raymonde had stubbornly forgotten. Mavis and Mavis and Mavis. Raymonde and Raymonde—O God she might have let them lie there—even Freddie.

No, no, not Freddie. Not Freddie. Anything but not that—Freddie with his eternal click of thumb and index, with his odd throaty constant little jibes at everyone—everyone—most of all at Freddie. Freddie never taking anyone seriously, least of all Freddie. "Blighty, Blighty blasted be our Blighty. England über alles" that was Freddie's peculiar panache, that was the then not quite diminished glory of poor Freddie. "England über alles" and "there's no place like Loos for solid comfort lest it be, albeit,

good old Vimy." Freddie with his (at the end) slightly hysterical outbursts against this "dear, dear Blighty that we die for."

"Über alles—über alles, Blighty über alles—" who was there left with any joke, any blith[e]ness, any *laissez-aller*? O *laissez-aller*—there was Mavis. But that wasn't, that wasn't it, Raymonde to herself protested. Things they all did circa 1917 became now by the turn of events either sordid or outright evil, vicious, O yes, horrible. It was horrible of Mavis. By a turn of fate, Raymonde was now turned a veritable Savonarola against the so-far tenacious memory of Mavis being pretty. Mavis being helpless.

A suppressed Savonarola rose in her, had risen at the spectacle of this enchanting Jewess so humbled, so helpless before an obvious brutal woman-retiarus with a net of intrigue. Was just that it? Savonarola rose in Raymonde and Raymonde recognized in herself the suppressed religio-maniac. Now Raymonde made no stand against all the past, against all her so-valiantly sustained determination to be loyal. Savonarola dominant in every Puritan, reactionary or otherwise, woke within her. Savonarola. Mavis in 1917 with her, "I prostituted myself" wouldn't now hold water. It wasn't fundamentally good enough. But to tear Mavis from her lighted London consciousness, meant tearing—was it Freddie? "Poor old Blighty über alles—that we die for." Was it tearing even Blighty from her highly evolved and complicated race-consciousness? Blighty of 1917 circa. Did it (had it ever) really happened? Blighty was a dream, a pays lointain; could any but a transplanted American know anything of Blighty? *Did* any know? Roses of Paestum. Landor in Fiesole. Browning on the Lido. Byron and his Chillon. Shelley and the Roman forum. How did one ever see them? Never Shelley in the marsh-lands of some fog-ridden county. Never Byron in Piccadilly. Never Browning at some West-End club. *Who fished the murex up?*

And where? Where? Where?

"Whatever *does* he look like?" Now Raymonde asked it, it seemed for the thousandth odd time, and she waited for the answer, though surely Ermy had told her, had conveyed an impression, some picture of some young man. There was, must be a picture of a young man somewhere. There was Mavis in a mirror and Mavis beyond each and all of the various incarnated Mavises of the old pre-war flowering. There was Mavis in a lavender hat with lilacs at her belt (there were belts then, an odd ribbon arrangement in three tiers) and Mavis in an ermine toque with violets. There was Mavis at a summer house-party in a series of green and green-blue "confections" (that was the inevitable word to use for those pre-war slightly 1880 back bustle effects

with tiers of little skirts) there was Mavis playing tennis (O so badly).

There was only one Ermy in a dull pottery brown smock and with a large hat to counter-balance this eternal over-lapping form of Mavis. "Were there roses on that large hat?" Already without waiting for Ermy to draw in the young man (so noticeably absent) Raymonde came back to the hat. "I mean when you stood in front of the mirror had you roses?" "Roses?" Ermy gazed at her in her own room. Ermy in Raymonde's room gazed at Raymonde. Ermy gazed at Raymonde and again Raymonde was shocked, recalled, as it were, to her rightful kingdom, her true terrain, the far past. The so far past. The so far past that it was the eternal present. If only she could get Mavis into that far past she would never lose her. This was her unfailing answer to the eternally recurrent problem. She could not. Mavis was and would be pre-war London, at her best, or at her richest flowering, London of 1917 or thereabouts. But Ermy would astound her. Pre-war Ermy? No, pre-Mycenaean, pre-Hyksos kings. Eternal, undeviating type. Eternal. Roses. Roses of Paestum. Roses. Ermy now said, "Roses?" "Didn't you say you had come in from the garden. The time, I mean you stared at yourself and Mavis in the mirror. Had you roses?" Raymonde had meant to ask Ermy if she had had roses on that wide straw hat. She now found herself asking, "had you roses?" meaning had she them in her belt (Ermy would know what she meant), her hands, anywhere "and what colour?"

The picture of the young man so lamentably absent from Raymonde's composite, subtle portrait now slightly obtruded. He seemed to look over the shoulders of the two women, standing. In front of a mirror a young man. A young man at last standing and regarding. The young man looked and looked at two faces in a mirror. "Chérie, chérie, O my precious. What 'glory of glorious eyes most fair.'" Raymonde heard the mocking, the throaty sous-entendre that nothing was worth taking seriously, that there was no reason for anything and certainly none for William Morris. "O glory of eyes, O glory of hair, O glory of glorious face most fair." Raymonde heard at last a voice (it was not Martin's), saw at last a face (it was this witch Ermy's doing) she heard an intonation she had not now for some almost ten years listened to. Mavis had seen to it. But Mavis was arrested. In a gesture. It all came back and now Raymonde saw not Ermy in that mirror of just that first war summer but another. She saw Raymonde eternal, never to be (any more than Ermy) dated. She saw a Raymonde in a blue-green dress falling to the floor. So far and so long ago (actually they wore long dresses) and with a little

necklet of clear amber. It was Freddie standing by her and Mavis' face was gone. The face that should have been Mavis' was gone. It was gone, obliterated. Had Ermy done this? For the first time in almost ten years Raymonde was thinking consciously of Freddie and there was no *arrière-pensée* as there must always be (she had thought) of Mavis. For the first time in almost ten years, Raymonde heard Freddie, "O glory of face—that excruciating blighter. He writes poetry like wall-paper patterns."

There *was* a young man in all her eternal overlaid and interworked pattern of women standing by a mirror. A mirror and inter-reflecting faces, of three women and back of it there was another. It had on a grey coat and it wore a tousled head of hair like a conqueror's helmet. "Freddie—but your *hair*." "Damn, chérie—don't nag at me, chérie. I never married you for a mother. Damn relatives. Chérie. I don't think that amber suits the purple." "It's not, Freddie, purple." "*The* purple, I mean, O most transpontine laticlave. Wherever did you find it?" "What, Freddie—amber?" "No, stupidissimo, the object I met coming from the garden. Two front teeth like a rabbit and what swanky pin-thread wedding trousers—pardon you say (I can't why imagine) pants." "I, Freddie, don't." "You, I mean, transpontinissimo, *all* you Yanks." "Dirty Yanks, Freddie." "Don't Ray, Raymonde be so catty. O most intimate, intricate—*where* did you put the object? Did you banish it? Is it a Yank? Your real Yank always dresses so much the part of fox-hunting squire that I expect he really is and always cut him. If you see an Englishman looking like an Englishman you'll know it's an American—" "Freddie, spare us before-dinner epigrams." "If you hear an Englishwoman speaking flute-like exquisite English you'll know it's an—" "No, Freddie. Not a good—Am-*muur*-ican—as you put it." "Yes, a perfectly good one. Is the object with, front rabbit jaw, a 'neditor." "Really Freddie." Freddie, Freddie. Over-layers of Freddie, Freddie—after ten years—with no Mavis.

"What exactly does—Martin" (Raymonde coming back to Ermy had almost said now "Freddie") "stand for?"

"Look here, Ray, there ain't no damned poets," the voice was going on. It was not Ermentrude certainly. It was a throaty voice with seriousness overlaid by eternal blitheness, by eternal light cyni[ci]sm, by eternal wit and glamour of something—long ago, long ago. Keats, Shelley, Browning. "There ain't, I tell you none, and now darling Raymonde there won't be." "Won't Freddie, be?" "I mean these very neat trenches with all modern conveniences are not con-*doocive* to poetry." "Yes, Freddie. But—but—afterwards." "My dear precious and guileful and sweetly gullible, Ray Bart. There ain't (ain't I told you ?) going to be no—afterwards."

"Freddie. What rot. It's almost now over." "Darling sweetly versed in *Daily Mail*ishness, there never will be." "Be what, Freddie?" "Any—afterwards." "But Freddie—think—Greece—Sparta. France even. It was after 1870 that they had the wonderful flowering. You yourself always saying so. Don't go back on what you brought me up on. You feeding me as you used to say 'culture with a spoon'. Why Freddie, de Gourmont, de Régnier, all, all, all of them—Pierre Louÿs even—after 1870. All, all writing in a sort of fever, after that war." "That war my dear precious unborn babe, lasted how long?" "O Freddie don't. It lasted long enough." "Not long enough to do in all the froggies. Ot-to-to-toi—the *Frogs* a new comic drama by' Freddiestophenes." "Freddie, Freddie—there will be—" "What most optimistic transparent transpontine?" "Poets." "One—yes one—one poet." "Freddie—" "No. Ray Bart."

There would be poets, there would be poets, there would be poets. Raymonde had even till the last held to it—but where were they? Girls walked smartly up Sloane Street and they had Joan of Arc heads, all of them. Joan of Arc upon Joan of Arc. She didn't know any young men—O Martin. "Yes Martin. Does he write good poetry?" "Martin—he doesn't write anything any more I tell you. Not now. Not any more now. He's stupid, is Martin and absolutely lazy. He can't move. He's like a pig in a bog." "Ermy." "He might have—he might have—Raymonde—you see him?"

No, there she drew the line, just there. There *was* a line for all the subtlety of London and over-layers of London on London. It came to her with a flash for the first time in this almost ten years that there *was* a line. There was, must be now, clear demarcation. There *was* a line. Mavis upon Mavis upon Mavis, Ermy upon Ermy upon Ermy. Raymonde upon countless tenuous Raymondes. But there *was* a line. There was evidently and obviously a line. She had reached it. She realised she had reached it. Slim and tenuous with no decisiveness, she had finally decided. It wasn't good enough. One must take up a standard, take up a banner, take up an attitude; she wanted to be "broad-minded," she was that. But far and far and far she realized eternal laws, eternal sufferings, eternal compensations. It was only now that she dared realize her past valiantly obscured suffering, now that Ermy had so to speak taken her place, made her in turn her sacrifice. Ermy had flung so to speak her morsel to the deities. O odd and twisted Mavis who might have been so beautiful. Mavis became suddenly in her thought a worn-out Hecate, standing avid at Crossroads, ready to blight, to harry any passer, Mavis had (there were no two ways about it) stolen outright Martin. And Martin (by this propitiating presence)

had returned her Freddie. It was to Ermy that she owed this. Freddie stood as he had not for almost ten years done, blithe and gay with no marring badges and no row of "pips" to claim him. With Freddie in his smart uniform stood Mavis. Put it that Mavis still stood by him. Beyond Freddie in smart uniform, beyond Mavis in a violet toque, there was another Freddie. And gazing at him from that very mirror—no—no Mavis. This time there was no Mavis. There was no Mavis at all. Only Raymonde, struggling to unfasten a troublesome little string of uneven amber that Freddie said didn't go with purple. "Not purple, stupidissimo. *The purple.*" Freddie said her little string of uneven pretty amber didn't go with *the* purple. No. It didn't. "You're right as always, Freddie of the exquisite taste. No. Of course not. Freddie, where's that other?" Raymonde was fumbling in a little boudoir dressing-table drawer and calling Freddie to help her, "you see I'll take your word and wear the other." But she couldn't find the other. She couldn't unearth the other little box. The minute trail of all the psychology of her minute past worry came now to her. In her own room, with Ermy waiting. What was Ermy waiting for? "O yes—those introductions."

Dear—which of them should she write to—she went to her desk and wrote it—*people*—Willy was her friend but it was Maud who could help Ermy. *Dear people, I'm sending an accomplished—what?—O bother "what are you Ermy?" research art sort of secretary person who wants to meet some people. I don't know who (or would "what" more express it?) you know darlings the sort of thing, all Florence is devastating. I shouldn't advise the Duomo (is he still as fat as ever?) she is far too pretty. Take her to Betti's, Giacosa's, the whole gamut for I must hear of you—you precious Tuscans—Chianti—violets above Fiesole, what do I think of? Chiefly those pearl and garnet ear-rings Willy—the brute—said Crofton mustn't get us. Love my dear Maud and to W. Do write me—"Will this do?"*

"I can't think of anyone else—they know everyone" now why didn't she go?

Raymonde was suddenly impatient. The line was drawn. She would let go that aura of the past. She would come (with a thump) to. She wasn't going to drift and drift any longer. The candles were too anemic. She switched on the electricity with a vicious little destructive jerk. Let Ermy be faced straight on, in all the porcelain-white of the electric glare. Raymonde wasn't going to drift any longer. Let Ermy have it face on. It was now up to Ermy. Raymonde's only just accredited past suffering now came clearly to her and she measured it by an absolute and unerring standard. She dared now measure her past suffering for if

Mavis had so taken Freddie in smart uniform, Mavis had returned him. Mavis had now given her a ghost Freddie (before the bedazzling "pips") and a ghost Freddie stood to warn her. The ghost Freddie spoke in the lingo of the other (a classic lingo one was now forgetting) of the one in smart uniform. It said in eternal monotony, "carry on, carry on, carry on." The ghost Freddie again spoke this time in the pre-war lingo, "there ain't going to be no afterwards. There ain't going to be no poets. Only one—" "Freddie—" "No" (he said it as if it were Norbert or Robert) "Raybart."

There wasn't going to be no afterwards. There wasn't. A ghost-world had fallen and obliterated all landmarks. There was no afterwards, there was no before. There was only a ghost-world that had obliterated land-marks that Mavis could not now take. A ghost stood beside her; it was a ghost that prompted her. "Go away dear Ermy. I must do some packing." "Packing? You just said that you didn't want to go abroad this winter." "Well, I didn't—" "O, but if you do," Ermy saw glowing impossibilities, "come to Florence." Feet—feet—feet—feet—feet—"No Ermy not—not Florence." "I thought you said you loved it." "So I do—do love it." "Well then *why* not? *Do*—" "I just can't?" "It is associations?" "Well—something—" How could Raymonde tell Ermy that it was feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. Carry on. "I'm going to my old Cret-d'y-Vau where it's quiet (it's the only place that really is), where I can get some work done."

IX

Mavis had "taken" Freddie in a smart uniform, Mavis had now returned him. For now if she thought of Mavis, Raymonde saw no longer Freddie but this other, this new accredited lover. There was a young Martin and sinking back in Ermy's armchair (Ermy had now finally departed) Raymonde faced absolutely straight that Martin. So far she had not seen him. Raymonde had not seen Martin for one moment. She had tried to force into consciousness, into the webbed and beautifully veiled composite picture of three overlapping faces and three overlapping interweaving realms of consciousness, this other. She had tried to drag in a picture of a young man that would go with Ermy with roses (it had, it appeared, been roses at her belt and as Raymonde had consciously pre-visionsed them, they were golden.) Raymonde had not seen any rare young face peering behind the shoulders of those others, of Mavis and Ermy. Till this moment. Now having so far opened up this so far so hermetically watertight compartment of her own sub-consciousness, she could see further. In the light of Freddie wearing tousled hair like a conqueror's helmet, she saw this other.

Martin. Martin. It was an accredited Martin who had now entered her world, her own small and yearly dimming realm of London. Martin. There was a Martin. A young man two removes off, it appeared, yet none the less an accredited young man who was taking part, who had his allotted square on her so complicated yet daily thinning chess-board. There was a Martin and against Martin another had moved, another presence that so far had stood between her and Freddie. Martin had moved up from somewhere and Ermy had so moved him. Martin had moved across and it was toward Mavis that he so moved. This was a clearance about her already sparse and scattered chessmen. There was a clearance and no doubt the game was now lost. Yet it had brought her Freddie.

Raymonde couldn't now any more (any more than she ever had done) turn violent toward Mavis. Mavis was like that. London was like that. Now Ermy had finally departed (it seemed thousands of years ago) she could for the first time in some almost ten years openly face Freddie[.] Ermy had been gone thousands of years (though her last prolonged cigarette was still smouldering in the ash tray) and in those thousands of years (those some five minutes) doors had opened, a whole realm had been revealed that had been there, it seemed, all the time; a whole realm of past memories with their corresponding vistas had been there all the time and it was Mavis who had kept them there, kept them fresh, for Mavis had been the very obstruction, the lava, the ashes, as it were, of that past disruption. Mavis had been there, all the time; Mavis. "But who can blame her? Who wouldn't love her?"

In protecting Mavis, Raymonde had made more secure this layer, this inhibition that had lain, ash and molten metal between her and Freddie. Between her and another Freddie, not the one that was itself a sort of inhibiting layer to this past one. Freddie in increasing ribbons, Freddie with increasing "pips" had too stood between herself and Freddie. Both now arraigned her. Both now complained and faced her with outspoken candour. "You might have been, why weren't you, like her?"

She could now face Freddie. She could now tell Freddie why she had not been like Mavis. She could not tell, she had not tried to tell the Freddie in the smart uniform all about it. For it was no use. There had been no use in anything. "But there isn't going to be any." "Any what, Freddie?" "Any at all—afterwards." There was no use in those days fighting that. There had been no use fighting Freddie. "I'm tired Freddie. That everlasting disappointment. It's left me lifeless." Freddie didn't any more than she did, want to then talk of that—disappointment in all its vivid and despairing details. She hadn't talked to Freddie. "You go—do Freddie—out with Mavis."

Yes, she had encouraged them. She had condoned, connived and what was the other? certainly collusioned with them. She had (Mavis was quite right) "asked" her to take Freddie. Mavis was right. Raymonde could now In the face of this rescuer Martin, face Mavis. She was willing now to say so. For what had Martin given her? Why, just eternal Freddie; Freddie in the Louvre, Freddie on the slope of Monte Solario. Freddie that first winter in the gorge above Cava where she had first seen primroses. "Don't you actually have them, transpontanissimo, in your country?" "My country? My country, Freddie? But this—is—my country." Raymonde had found Italy, found all that past layer of consciousness that was life to her with Freddie. "Then precious, you don't want England?" "Freddie, later." She hadn't wanted to so simply marry Freddie. She wanted to be free and wild and to find beauty on her own, on its own. "But you will, Fleurette?" "Some time. Freddie do you like these Italian primav-eres?" "I worship everything Italian. I never was happy till this minute. I love it. I am it. I adore it. I never saw the sun till now. Don't let's ever go back. Let's stay here." The hills were covered (that winter) with star darts of the poet's narcissus. Small minute anemones too crowned Solario. "Then why do we?"

Freddie, Freddie, Freddie. There were numberless Freddie's, mostly rather ragged, tousled, unkempt. "But I didn't marry you" (this later) "for a mother. Now don't answer. You never will be. I can't have you broken." Freddie hadn't wanted her broken. "You're too frail." When it happened everything was different. Then Freddie said grimly, "well, if you can bear it—it will perhaps carry on—afterwards." "Afterwards?" "I mean—for me." That there was no afterwards for either of them—for Freddie or that other made no difference. They were both shrined somewhere. They were both of an eternal double kingdom, a half world, a ghost world; they were part of London. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. "Nurse why do they all go—why must they all— all go?" Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet marching past the window. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet keeping pace, keeping time to the terrible rhythm—feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Birth and death. Death and birth. "Nurse, nurse—stop—stop them." "Now Mrs Ransome. Don't, don't for its sake get hysterical." Hysterical? Couldn't they know, couldn't they see, all these dear and blessed English people, what was happening? Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. "But nurse why the young ones—so tall. Why, why, why, why? Let the old—ones—go." Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. There would be a world of old people and of battered people, never any more feet, feet, feet, feet, feet— "Stop them—stop them—" "Now Mrs Ransome you

must be more—careful.” Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet all the best, all the young ones. One with blue eyes, another, another, all with blue eyes. They were tall, young gods, there never were more beautiful, more straight tall young men. Going, on, on, on, on, on. “I love them—all—all—all.” “Now Mrs Ransome quiet—quiet—it—will—be—worse—” Raymonde heard it, sitting in the big armchair that Ermy had left. She heard it with the sound of feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. “It will be much worse before it’s any better.”

Things, it seemed, were to be much worse before they were any better and she heard the sound in some realm of now accredited consciousness, the sound of protestation, of rebuke even, “now Mrs Ransome, don’t talk that way. You after all, as an American, can’t feel as we do.” Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Thank God, thank God, for that. For that. That as an American she could—not—feel. “God, God, stop them. Stop them. God, God, God, stop them.” “Now Mrs Ransome, you owe it to your husband.” “But this is—my—husband—all this.” Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. They understood pain. They understood death. They understood annihilation.

Poor dear Freddie. He had not understood. How could she make him? “Fleurette. You seem different. You don’t—care.” “Not that. Not that. Don’t say that Freddie.” There was no Freddie. She had been alone. There had been no Freddie. Nothing. Pain, pain, pain. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. She had not been alone. She had been part of it, the eternal rhythm. “It will—be—worse—” It was worse, much worse. It was much, much worse. “As an—American—” As an American she was not expected to understand. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. So tall, so young. It will—be worse— “Don’t nurse. Don’t nurse.” Voices, far and far and far. “Nervy—not much grit—*an American.*”

Raymonde sitting in Ermy’s chair in her own room, heard as far and far and far the voice that went on, that went on explaining to someone else, “taking it badly. A pity—” Something was a pity. Something had happened. With the sound of feet, feet, feet in her head, something terrible had happened, was going to happen, was always going to happen. Ermy, odd enchantress, had by her so boldly facing Martin and Mavis made Raymonde face too the inevitable. The corresponding picture of Mavis and with it just Freddie. Freddie in smart uniform who wasn’t really Freddie at all, who was going with feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Who was so closely interwoven with those other feet that to love Freddie was to love them all, all, all. “Somewhat a tall order.” “I love them all—all—all.” Some one in a kind but cynical voice

was saying to someone with another kind of voice, not kind but cynical and unkind, a nurse-voice. Someone was saying half-amused and wholly (it seemed) pitiful. "She's had a shock—a strain—a strain—something—" The other voice answering, "*an American*". It would go on forever those voices talking and the accompanying sound of feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. There was an answer. The answer came at last. (For what did Ermy matter, what did Mavis matter, what did the young man who-didn't-matter matter beside another a voice of insuperable gallantry, of insuperable delicacy?) It said simply, "we're all so sorry, Mrs Ransome, for your disappointment." That was it. There was nothing else. That was the answer to feet—feet—feet—feet—feet. It was always a—disappointment.

How could Freddie understand? Could she ever make it clear to Freddie? She was no more called to. Freddie was gone and the feet would pass forever, forever past her window. That was why she stayed here. Stayed on in London. She was part of it, not of the past, not even of the future. Simply of the feet that passed forever, would forever pass. People didn't know, had forgotten. Some must remember. She was a beacon burning for those who might remember. That was why she was there. She was there as a beacon, for people had forgotten. Had never really known or seen or cared. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. They would have stopped them if they had cared. They would have thrown themselves down before the feet, feet, feet. Only let them stop. "Nurse, Nurse. Stop them."

There was no use at all. Things were just the same. But now Mavis had Martin. It was all the same. An exchange of names simply. No one progressed and the new Joan of Arc girls so blithe, passing all secure and undeviating up Sloane Street, didn't know about it. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Let Mavis have Martin. She had let go Freddie.

Mavis had let go Freddie, a Freddie who was never known to Mavis. By facing that straight, a whole area of Raymonde's sub-consciousness was shifted, was opened up as if a layer of hardened, protective sand and lava had been sifted. Behind that layer, the things that had been (really because of that layer) blighted were, by the same token, now fresh. The thing that had ruined her memories, had kept them from her consciousness, kept them forever static, frozen eternally, images, eternal witness of the spirit. Mavis had blighted Freddie. She had saved him. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Raymonde hadn't heard the feet when Mavis was sitting on her bed talking. "Yes I did see—Guildford." Mavis, telling a shy little story of one Guildford who adored her.

How doubly distilled subtle of Mavis. Mavis had put up that second barrier, that second line of defences not only for the blinding of poor silly Raymonde but also for the gaining of support. For who would not support a Mavis who told one, all shivering and unprotected about a certain Guildford with a car and the inevitable princely eye-glass?

Mavis had taught her many things. Raymonde was eternally grateful to Mavis. But most of all for this new region that she gave her. This new and empty city, a ghost replica of the one where she had once in bodily form wandered with a pre-war tousled Freddie. A city full of silence, of peace, a city of death, yet more than that, a city of the spirit. A spiritual city where no one, no one could come. Raymonde could rest in London wandering in that city. Why, after all, take the tiring trip to Cret-d'y-Vau, all ice and shale and snow and inspiration? Why any more write? Raymonde had discovered her pays lointain. It was here in London.

The room was still common-place with that glare of electricity which she had switched on (this very same white glaring down-pour) with her vicious destructive little jerk so that Ermy, gazing at her out of idealizing shadows, should be in some manner thwarted and got into common-place perspective. Raymonde could not now drift any longer in this white glare. She thought, switching off the light, she would substitute dim candles. However she did not, as the suddenly darkened room was as suddenly filled with a new insubstantial, idealizing but easily to be analysed security of shadow. She stared there in the darkness. The black pool and the triangular radiance of her changed interior was caused simply by the brilliance of the street-lamps that cast a wholly startling yet reposeful radiance through her parted curtains. The room was blocked in by the brilliance of the light from the street lamps and it might have been suspended in space, so clear, so luminous, so suggestive of a portal behind the wall which she knew as just a honey-coloured stippled little room wall. Behind the honey-colour of her little wall, Raymonde felt another wall was waiting. The wall to some squared-in little court-yard with the inevitable squared-in little fountain. From far and far and far the notes of that South Italian water and the soft eternal corresponding throat-notes of the ring-doves. Ring-doves would be perched on the marble rim of the fountain basin. Beyond the court-yard there were olive orchards—to dream—dream—dream—dream. London was the place for absolute obliteration, for this drift of the senses that was a sort of oriental state of god-in-nothingness. There was no sheer physical ecstasy to equal this drift and dreaming with one's mental powers dulled over by

this oriental London. To drift and drift and drift. Mavis was right. Mavis held to drift and obliteration. What did it matter that the young man was not much over twenty? There was drift and obliteration. “*Do* see Martin.” Behind Martin there was another Martin. Martins reflected, as in many double mirrors went on forever and forever. “Does he write—well?” Raymonde recalled her vague, half-interest in the matter and Ermy’s answer to it. “He doesn’t at the moment write anything. He’s a blighter. He’s let everything slide.” “Why doesn’t she get him to?” “Get him to? It takes some getting.” Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Carry on, carry on, Ray Bart. “Why doesn’t he, why doesn’t Martin carry on? Why, Freddie, doesn’t Martin?” Raymonde asked this to a wide room. It seemed the room stretched back and back and back from her little honey-coloured stippled wall beyond even the extensive Mews that backed against her building from the dark side. Above the Mews, suspended in mid-air there was another room, another series of rooms, another series of sensations. Beyond London, as beyond no other city in the world, there was almost tangibly another city. Beyond and beyond and beyond— “Let Martin do some writing. Or some of these Joan of Arcs with hair cuts—” Carry on, carry on, carry on.

“But Freddie, why should I carry on? There are plenty of others. I am now just early” (who of her generation wasn’t) “middle-ageing.” Carry on. “Let the Martins do it.” It seemed (she now saw it) there *were* young men now other than that vast horde she herself was so poignantly associated with. Carry on. “But nurse if I were you, I should throw myself down, get all the suffragettes to stop it. They used to smash windows. Why didn’t they all go—fight? Why didn’t they all go it equal, young man matched with older one—why all *young* men? They all have blue eyes. They go on, on, on, on, on—or is it my heart beating? No. This must stop. Must stop.”

“Now, Mrs Ransome. You don’t understand—” Going on. Going on. Until it got worse, worse. There was nobody left and everyone looked her ugliest, even Lily Mount in an old horrible corduroy coat and skirt. Only Mavis. Prettier, prettier. There were women like that. Prettier, prettier. Well let Mavis be, be that, be pretty, prettier. Carry on. Carry on. O Ermy, O Hampstead Jewess, why did you come? Why do you make me do it? Go away Ermy staring at me from the shadows. An Ermy stared at Raymonde from the block of light and its corresponding area of heavy shadow. It stood (she could only just not see it) with yellow roses and it looked at itself, at herself and she and Ermy were in this, it seemed, equal. “Well, I had my dose, thank you, Ermy.

It's your turn. I can't help you." Carry on, carry on. Ermy ought to know better, ought to have associated herself so completely with feet, feet, feet, that the outer world would hold, could never hold another. Only Leonard. Carry on. But Ermy had not been so wedded to it. "It will—be worse—" Ermy had not known that—carry on, carry on— "much—worse—before—it's—better." Ermy didn't know that finality of—disappointment. "But why nurse? Why not stop them?" That she was or was not, as they say, "flighty," that she was or was not what they term "delirious" did not matter. That pain and that sound and that rhythm of pain and that rhythm of departure were indissolubly wedded. Or was it her heart beating? Feet, feet, feet, feet. No, Freddie, no Freddie not metres. Not poems. Not that kind of feet. Not trochaic, iambic or whatever, not verse, free or otherwise. I am listening to something. To feet, feet, feet, but not that kind, not your kind Freddie. No not iambic feet, not beat and throb of metre, no Freddie. I don't want to write it.

Now she may say that I adore her face——

No Freddie, I don't want to think in metres. I'm tired of being a sort of lightning-rod for all the metres. Let someone with Joan of Arc hair, let Martin be a lightning rod——

O grave, O true——

Who is grave and true? I don't want to write it.

For looking on that ruin of her grace——

ruin of her grace. Ruin of her grace. But I like Mavis. Ruin of her grace, ruin of her grace, but I don't particularly like Ermy——

I shall see mirrored back——

O that eternal mirror, that eternal Ermy standing hypnotized, transfixed by this idea, this idea of betrayal. She was old enough to know better. Or else she should have identified herself with the self-sufficing Joan of Arc generation. She should have done one thing or the other. She should have known better (you yourself Freddie would be the first to say so) than to go straight into Circe's hall, to Eastacres with a totally inexperienced young man. Martin. Martin. Martin. There was it seemed, a Martin. Martin could now write——

I shall see mirrored back, my own——

whose own? Ermy was not her own. She would prefer (put to it) Mavis who had sophistication, knew how to dress. An odd face regarded Raymonde from the strip of dimmed-over blue rug. It had stood there for generations. It would always stand there. It was part of antiquity that Freddie loved. It was not dated, war or pre- or post-war. It was dated, not even by the robes it wore (no “county” touch) transparent draperies—a band of deep purple about its blue-black hair. Hyacinth hair. That was the blue-black of the lettered hyacinth. The hyacinth is black. The hyacinth. I shall see mirrored back my own, just you.

*I shall see mirrored back, my own, just you,
all grave and decorous and very rare,
as one set with dull gold——*

dull gold—dull gold—roses that she carried, facing herself another, another, another. A Muse. Something wedded not to Martin. Never to Martin. Just you all grave and decorous and very rare; Ermy was very rare. Why wasn’t it Mavis she was writing of? Why wasn’t it Freddie? It was Ermy

*set with dull gold and amber
and with fair——*

fair, yes fair, they were dark but they were fair—Tyrian blue hyacinths—ah she had it—she now had it—she had always known it—now she had it, actually Freddie, a line I have always looked for—

*as one set with dull gold and amber and with fair
Tyrian blue hyacinths against hyacinth hair.*

X

She had told Ermy that she wasn’t going abroad. Then she had told Ermy that she was going abroad this winter. But whatever she said (dictated to by opposing moods) she knew that she would, whatever mood were uppermost, find herself there inevitably. Drift and drug of obliteration. Si j’ai parlé de mon amour. O funny, little tiny Cret-d’y-Vau with its gigantic and disproportionate background of magnificence. Raymonde would be dwarfed in Cret-d’y-Vau with no drift and drug of obliteration, only the jagged points of that hateful and domineering mountain

to drag her mind up, up, up to its highest attainment. Drug and drift. She would prefer London. Si j'ai parlé de mon amour (Freddie's amour). Now she knew, with rhythms recurrent in her head that she was again fated for d'y-Vau. She didn't want to go. She would go as inevitably as the sun-rise, as the sunset. A line came on and on, and in the now renewed porcelain white electric glare she tried (in spite of writing pad almost visibly palpitating with expectancy on the little table—she had pushed aside the tea-things) to fend it off. With the very pencil she held poised, she tried to fend off her recurrent metres for what did it matter—she was no judge, never had been a judge of Mavis. Why judge Mavis? It was part of her pride, of her not quite diminished glory that she should not. *Now she may say that I adore her face.* One little poem was enough. The icy glamour of the thing she knew was Ray Bart's helmet closed above her. Above Raymonde's forehead (where she would have worn some slight and fragrant but soon withering little crown of field flowers) Ray Bart's helmet rested. The helmet of Ray Bart weighed heavy on her. Ermy had said (Raymonde would have preferred drifting, on, on, on) "but Martin would adore you." Who was Martin? He was a young man (Raymonde could almost in the light of Freddie see him now) who belonged to—not, not Mavis. Yes, Mavis. Mavis had set her so poignant seal now on Martin, now on this other. She had sealed a door, signed "no admittance" to another Martin, Ermy's Martin, wandering half-developed in some soft and fragrant Botticelli meadow. Martin was now it seemed utterly of another realm. He repudiated all his young child-like searchings. Martin was now, it appeared, grown up. Young men had to grow up. Why—if Mavis did not "take" them, finally and inevitably someone else would. Perhaps, someone violent and obviously destructive. Yet even as Raymonde argued in her determined logic and in her set determination to see both sides and to see clearly, the rhyme from outside broke across her set determination to be fair to Mavis, like an icy lance of cold rain across some low-lying feverish marsh land. *Now she may say that I adore her face.* Something, some other metre, was about to tick, tick like some insistent metronome in the air above her; to tick-tick, penetrating even that very protective silver surface that was the helmet of Ray Bart resting where Raymonde would have worn small fragrant non-committal and eternal field flowers. "Why shouldn't Mavis?" Beyond the Botticelli there was another Botticelli—beyond the—on walls there were laws written. There was a law carved on white marbles. Set in gold on alabaster. Ray Bart insisted with her eternal silver helmet that on the walls of Delphi there was a law of hospitality carved with as hard and

brilliant finality as that written once on Sinai. Thou shalt not (what was it ?)—O steal—commit adultery. This wasn't—Really one did not nowadays use such gross epithets. It was not—thou shalt not—They all did—It was another law that rose to challenge that side of her complicated mental equipment that still sided, determinedly with Mavis. It was written with suave point, carved with delicacy and geometric precision. It was a law as old as the other "thou shalt not"—yet without any of its goat-gross associations. A law was carved with sophisticated stylus; it was written on the walls of Delphi. It was a law, gravely and tersely worded (though she could not exactly recall that terse Greek sentence) about the sanctity of the stranger, moreover of the inviolability of the guest. Repudiate even the ten Jewish laws there were other laws of hyper-sophistication. The law of hospitality, O Mavis, Mavis—how could you be so lacking in breeding. That was it utterly. O Mavis have your lovers (Raymonde still wanted to protect Mavis) but why, why this way? Beyond Raymonde there was another Raymonde. She called it Ray Bart. Freddie called it Ray Bart (as if it were Robert or Norbert). "Raybart there are no poets." There are Freddie. Carry on. *Now she must say that I adore her face.* But she wanted to drift, to drift—this hateful metronome that beat and beat. Did people know that poetry was an avid metronome that began beating and that would not stop until you bent your mind to it, slim flexible steel that was the mind of Ray Bart? Ray Bart (Freddie said it as if it were Norbert or Robert) was now waiting. Carry on. Her hands were ice cold and she fended still a little feebly with the pencil. *Ah let me love it now her treachery.* Yes what did it matter? Mavis' treachery had pierced through a layer of lava and underneath, old obliterated treasures were now revealed, virginal and fresh as they could never have been if they had not been so covered; that were now as if new. Freddie and all the past. *Let me stoop low, be free, of all my old compunction.* For what anyhow with feet, feet, feet, feet, feet could anything any more matter? Tick-tick of metronomic beat and tick-tick like some curious bird that pecked almost visibly at her skull to pick out, to prod out that choice morsel, that small living grub, that thing that lived in her mind, eating into her. Inspiration, they said was a high and vibrant rush of wings. It was not. It was a small painful grub that sank deep and gnawed into one's forehead and burrowed painfully deeper. It must be prodded out like some festering splinter. Inspiration was more like a festering splinter than a rush of wings.

*See, see, see,
I will be wise, be subtle,
not more pure than she is——*

for Raymonde never had wanted to stand up, to set herself up for some plaster-of-paris model of virtue—of motherhood. Motherhood? “It will—be—worse.” It was much worse. The canker, the pain, the fester that was inspiration. It bit and scalded into Raymonde’s forehead but it must be borne. Poor Mavis. She didn’t want to strike outright at Mavis, *with invidious lies*. They were “invidious lies” but Raymonde didn’t want to strike outright at Mavis. Invidious lies. Sitting on the nursing room bed, bringing violets. Odd twisted Mavis. Did she then conceivably *love* Raymonde—

*with invidious lies
that even they might boast of
who debate
before the storm and sea wind
and the great
bellowing of rent sails
and, the inviolate host
who, sent for Beauty,
died before Troy gate.*

XI

It was tiresome this business of writing. Now it would be too late really to enjoy supper. Why was it after some strain like this, when she especially repudiated her genius, it so came to plague her? A plague. Laws were written and Delphic Helios who was a god of song, of poetry, was a god of laws. The laws of song were as undeviating as the laws of sun and moon and in their undeviating glamour lay one’s one hope, one’s one sustenance. Thou shalt not—thou shalt not—Reactionary Puritan, she had found in the undeviating laws of Delphi a more straight-laced puritanism than even Cotton Mather’s. Salem witch-craft. Delphic oracles. There were laws of song, laws of being, laws of hospitality. There were laws of right and wrong that when applied to the minutiae of worldly life held poignant and unswerving. The salt of heroic metres had in no way lost savour. Thou shalt—thou shalt not—no, no, no, no, no. She was conclusive in her statement. But how boring. She would have to go on, on, on, on, on, on to Delphic Helios, whose laws (if people could but know it) were more Puritanic and unassailable than those wrought at Sinai on rough hill stone.

Now she may say that I adore her face. Raymonde must write that down carefully before she went on to anything else. Paper and pencil. Parchment and stylus. Delphic Helios who was competent to deal with a broken pencil, whose laws held inviolate over the merest dust heap. Laws like reading tea leaves. James Joyce was right. Inflexible laws were to be read in the meanest actions, the set of a ribbon (nowadays one didn't wear ribbons.) Raymonde yawned. Scratched the first poem carefully on her fresh pad, regarded it, rescratched. It was cold. No supper. These small sacrifices.

*Now she may say
that I adore her face,
O brave, O true,
for looking on that ruin of her grace,*

*I shall see mirrored back,
my sun, just you,
all grave and decorous
and very rare,*

*as one set with dull gold and amber
and with fair
Tyrian-blue hyacinths
against hyacinth hair.*

Tyrian blue hyacinths against hyacinth-hair. She could hear Freddie, "O plagiarissimo. However will they miss it, 'thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face'?" Yes, Ermy's was a classic face. From far and far and far another face, the banished face. O keep away. Don't let me any more see Mavis. I would like to retain some scrap of feeling for her. From far and far and far as inexorable as the laws rimmed in gold on marble was this—(and she re-copied it)—

*Ah, let me love it now,
her treachery,
let me stoop low, be free
of all my old compunction;*

*see, see, see,
I will be wise, be subtle,
not more pure than she is,
with invidious lies*

*that even they might boast of
who debate
before the storm and sea-wind
and the great*

*bellowing of rent sails
and the inviolate host,
who, sent for Beauty,
died before Troy-gate.*

From far and far and far. Raymonde's hands were so cold. She was too hungry to any more care about supper and now she wouldn't sleep. Her mind strung up like a harp-string to some too vibrant frame would go on, on, on, on, on, vibrating after the thought that touched it, urged it, to this vibrancy went on elsewhere. Strung too high, too vibrant (there were some left over apple-tarts in the kitchen cupboard and she could heat up some bouillon—but it was almost too late) the thought that touched the string had wandered elsewhere and the string itself was quiet. But the frame too highly seasoned of too fine, too rare, too polished a fine wood was full of a secondary throbbing. Bother, my hands are too cold. I can't be any more expected to write even if I had any more ideas. Cold, cold, cold. Better to be cold or get up and lose one's inspiration (which anyway was tiresome) getting at the coal box? From far and far and far. "That girl Ermy will have to be careful in Florence. Italians don't play around with things. She'd better marry again or stop this head-hunting, this lion hunting." Lions? Were there any? Very young ones. Dear darling Mavis, fancy at her time of life a boy of not much over twenty. But after all, her squeamishness was perhaps a suppressed jealousy. After all—jealous. Yes. I think I might have a look sometime at Martin. From far and far and far. Lines written on white marble. Lines flaming almost visibly in the air before her. Laws of hospitality. "I think I would have done the same thing if I went in wholesale for that sort of thing. Ermy only stirred him up I mean—if I *did*—and thinking is just as bad." To look upon a—a—a—Martin. To look upon a Martin. Christ had broken down all barriers. There was no right and wrong. There was a law of love. Love your—enemies. Poor old Mavis.

Now she may say that I adore her face. But after all Mavis was right, saying to Ermy, "how could anyone look at me, Ermy after you?" How could anyone? How indeed. Ermy standing with those gold roses and that unexpected pathetic droop of a mouth that looked carved for all time static in its completion, in its own

knowledge of its own immutable beauty. *Who sent for Beauty.* Ermy had Beauty. O, it was an insult to Beauty! This young man was guilty of lack of reverence, of grossest insult—no, not the young man. How he must adore Mavis. Raymonde could see him almost—O dreadful—no, not see him—not see her—he couldn't have actually seen her. Some people love with their eyes. It was not Martin. It was not Martin. *Who sent for Beauty—died—*feet, feet, feet, feet. It was too much. Carry on. Carry on for it will be much—much—worse—*Now she may say—*Ermy said that Martin said she was undeveloped. So she was. Ermy would have to be careful in Florence. Italians weren't like that. Ermy was undeveloped. Martin said Ermy was like the moon after Mavis who (he said) was vibrant with heat, with warmth—O, all those eternal Freddie-isms. She could hear Freddie, "you don't *feel* anything." Moon, sun. Ermy would make a good Rosalind, but was she an actress,[?] She was beautiful. Everyone must see that. Or would see it—*Many have come, will come—*yes, many, many, many, for Ermy was a symbol when she wasn't silly but Italians were different. Ermy was Beauty, but she must be more careful. *Sent for Beauty. Many will come, have come.* Ermy was like Queen Nefertiti—a queen—roses—roses in her belt—roses of Paestum. But South Italian roses were always (must be) crimson. A Greek rose was gold. A rose. Italians were different.

*Many have come, will come,
my queen, but see,
the rose so regal
with its splendid red*

*drips petals down, down, down;
so my earth bled,
hearing they had maligned,
had slighted you,*

*hearing they called you
unalive and small,
a tinted mirror
and a little moon;*

*think, O enchantress,
smile and think how soon
the rose is scattered
and the sun is fled.*

Raymonde didn't have to re-copy it only if she re-copied would get into the string's vibrancy again. But she didn't altogether want to. She read the poem aloud. It was a little Omar Khayyámish. Rose. Petals down, down, down. I sometimes think there never blooms so red. The rose—the rose—the—rose—as where some buried Caesar. God, God. God—stop them, stop them—stop them. They all, all, all, all were—Caesar. Caesar bled. Caesar bled. Not that I loved—not that I loved—not that I loved. Not Rome, not Freddie, not Mavis, not Ermy. Something compounded like faces seen one on top of another. Art wasn't seen any more in one plane, in one perspective, in one dimension. One didn't any more see things like that. Impressions were reflected now, the salt had lost—they were overlaid like old photographic negatives one on top of another. Freddie on top of Martin. To love Martin—Martin. But now she may say that I adore her face. Yes, I adore her face for she has given me this. This knowledge that there is no law. The knowledge that there are laws rimmed on alabaster and immutable.

XII

*Many have come, will come,
my queen but see,
the rose so regal
with its splendid red——*

it wasn't so bad. The rose so regal. It sounded like a new transcription from Khayyám. Yes Ermy was the East. Persian. Further even—Egypt. Her eyes shone like a cat in some temple of Bubastis. Her eyes were set in the clean cut line of the immaculate face contour like amber eyes set into the face of some one dimensional Egyptian cat. Egypt so to speak, geometric in one dimension, opened doors. Doors led through. Odd sensation; thought in sensation. The line of a cat's back that was the key-note to some magic formula. Art was magic—but it had lost—had lost—its savour. Joyce was right. It had lost. Art was magic but it had lost. Must get back into art the magic it had had in Egypt. Greece even. Odd line in Egypt spelt exact and scientific formula. The amber eyes were set in the cat face that was drawn with its smile and whiskers like some geometric formula. For science and art and life in Egypt were represented by a formula. Ermy was a formula. Mavis was a blur. Mavis was the blur of some Celtic cloud, the incense of some banished Circe that rose in spirals toward an enchantress' cedar roof so that Greeks (thinking men) were blurred over and forgot their Greek formula.

Greek formula must not be forgotten. Mavis blurred over, made one forget formula. It was easier to forget than to remember. To remember. Poetry was to remember. To remember Ermy and her odd eyes. Mnemosyne. The mother of—mother—feet, feet, feet, feet. feet. It—will—be—James Joyce was right. Formula to be enduring must be destroyed. Mavis was right. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet—the absolute lack of the salt in the formula had sent them to die—where some buried Caesar bled. It had lost its savour when it sent them. “Tell the Lacedaemonians that we lie here obeying their orders.” Greeks upon Greeks died that men might know that the formula must be reformulated. Poetry. Ermy’s eyes were like stones and she hadn’t cried. Mavis always cried with tears like an April shower on a bush of flowering blue hydrangea. Blue hydrangea. Mavis’ flower-eyes just not matching it (like the subtle blend on some rue d’Échelles spring model) and the matron had been impressed. Ermy’s eyes.

*You said he said
that she was like the sun;
your eyes are golden
and no bright tears come*

*to silver them—but Ermy wasn’t silver. Silver. A helmet.
Beat and beat of metres. Feet, feet, feet. To silver them—*

*to silver them as agate
under rain——agate under rain——agate under rain——*

*to silver them as agate,
under rain; valiant
you ask no quarter
in your pain;*

*you said he said
that you are nowise sun
but moon, a thing of mirroring
and wan night;*

*pity, O Pity those,
my something—or—other—de—dum-de-dum
who see as moles
Who never have seen light.*

No, they hadn't. They hadn't seen light. How could they see light? Light was a formula to see which you must let go, drop down, down, down. Like petals drop down, down, down. Sacrifice. Many have come, will come—where Caesar bled. The rose so regal with its splendid red drops petals where some buried Caesar—they all had. She had. It will—be—they all had. They must make a formula from the sacrifice. The Greek formula. "Tell the Lacedaemonians we lie here obeying their orders." Whose orders? God, God, God, God stop them. "You, Mrs Ransome don't understand. An American.—" She was an *American*. There must be one formula for all. One formula written in a cryptic language that everyone would understand. Poor Heine, poor Heine—but he was a Jew. He was like Ermy, a Jew. Poor Heine. Thou shalt love thy—thou shalt love— It broke down formulas but there must be another. Beyond the broken formula, beyond love your enemy (a good formula) there was another. It preceded thou shalt love thy enemy. It was cut on white stone. It was rimmed with gold. Song, song, song, had lost—its savour. There are many, many but the rose drops petals down, down, down. What an afternoon. She was cold. No supper. What was his name? Freddie? No, Martin.

*Name me your lover,
let me have the clue,
just what he said
and how he humbled you,
saying your eyes were not so fair
so kind,
naming her beautiful
and you yet young,*

*unopened, unawakened,
not yet grown;
O brow imperial,
O queenly height,*

*speak on, speak on;
tell me again, again, each faulty phrase,
let me hear blame, blame, blame,
no praise,*

Shrine, shrine, shrine, shrine. There were shrines, shrines in spite of what people said. There were shrines beyond shrines, feet beyond feet, faces beyond faces. Faces overlaid now one another like old photographic negatives and faces whirled on and on and on, like petals down, down, down as if all those overlaid photographic negatives had been pasted together and rolled off swifter, swifter, swifter from some well controlled cinematograph. Her mind behind her mind turned the handle (so to speak) for a series of impressions that devastated her with their clarity, with their precision and with their variety. On, on, on, on, on. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. A blue hydrangea. Mavis with great April eyes because (she had rushed in to confess it) Guildford (he had some sort of hectic title) wasn't, it happened, there, after all, at the rendez-vous. Faces, people, London. People, faces, Greece. Greece, people, faces. Egypt. James Joyce was right. On, on, on, on, and out of it like some deep-sea jewel pulled up in a net squirming with an enormous catch of vari[e]gated squirming tentacled and tendrilled memories, just this, this—*who fished the murex up?* Who, who, who? Was it a question of American, French or Indian? Was it a matter of Greece, Rome or Petrograd? The gem, the eternal truth, the eternal law, the song, saga was beyond the shallow boundary of nationality. As an *American*—she protested. Immutable laws were rimmed in ivory and gold and Christ had been right; love those that persecute—that persecute you. Love Mavis. Love her. Love Mavis. Enter, by some miracle of mental and spiritual leger-de-main, into the very soul of Martin and by some spiritual subtlety enter and love Mavis. But stand apart and out of it, stand out of it—O the disgust—the white passion of pure Delphic law that had been desecrated. Mavis desecrated laws of millions of years standing, laws that went beyond even the immutable law of the geometry that was engraved in the paws and triangulated eyes of the Egyptian's sacred cat—laws, laws, were written on stone, were engraved in ivory. The laws of Christ were written in flower petals, were cloud and fire. They permeated, the temple of ancient Greece like blue incense. Thou shalt love—permeated the temples of the Nile where they had already written these things in vast scrolls that reeled still off, off, off before her as if some cinematograph were unrolled and unrolling revealed new vistas, new surfaces of antiquity. Face upon face, impression upon impression and all of modernity (as she viewed it) was as the jellified and sickly substance of a collection of old colourless photographic negatives through which gleamed the reality, the truth of the blue temples of Thebes, of the white colon[n]ades of Samos.

“Tell the Lacedaemonians—orders.” There were orders. The orders of song. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. Antiquity showed through the semi-transparence of shallow modernity like blue flame through the texture of some jelly-fish-like deep-sea creature. Modernity was unfamiliar and semi-transparent and it obscured antiquity while it let a little show through, falsified by the nervous movement of its transparent surface. Falsified by the nervous erratic jerks of its deep-sea members. Modernity was the unfamiliar, always baffling substance. Back of it—back of it—Ermy was standing on her smoke-blue rug. The candles were uneven. The third one had left a lump of uneven wax on the brass cup of the branched candlestick. The first, second, fifth of the seven had burnt almost even, almost on one level. The fourth was the odd over-swift one—years, years, years, Ermy was standing. Ermy was looking at her. Ermy was too tall. She was out of proportion but she ought to get a job. One must do one’s job. Ermy should get her job. They were all out of proportion. But the formula must be maintained even if the whole of the jelly-fish of modernity turned octopus and strangled them. It would not hurt antiquity. Antiquity would be waiting across the chasm. Antiquity was waiting across a chasm strewn with Caesars. Drips petals, down, down, down. I sometimes think there never bloomed so red the rose—down, down, down. Antiquity was security. Laws were immutable. *You said he said that she was like the sun.* Metres in her head that beat and beat and beat. It was so late. There might yet be time for boullion and some biscuits. Raymonde was tired but her brain was a rose where some buried Caesar bled and Ermy was looking at her. Against the wall that she was glad she had decided to have redone that clear over-wash of corn-colour (a soft fresco-like effect) as in London one needed yellow to counteract the grey outside. Such a tiny room to hold so much, so many superimposed people. And she was happy alone here and didn’t want to go away. They were passing, would always be passing and she would remember them; as an *American* she would remember them. Buried Caesars lay there obeying orders. The Lacedaemonians had forgotten. O white faces, white faces, stop, stop, stop, stop. Couldn’t people stop the faces, the white faces? They were looking at her, calling to her across the chasm where buried Caesars dripped petals down, down, down. They were staring at her demanding of her—no, it was only Ermy staring from the blue rug. Ermy staring at Ermy. Ermy staring at Mavis. Ermy staring at Raymonde waiting for an answer.

*My room is small
 but gold and very pure,
 you being there;
 queens pass before me in sufficiency,
 not small,
 but all,
 of just one stature, yours,
 all, all so tall
 and narrow at the hips
 with just such eyes;
 could they surmise
 what rests here,
 would they speak,
 dare question, dare affront,
 O how I pity them,
 must love,
 would almost pray
 that you too pity—see
 by my walls,
 what power, what majesty!*

The murex was just that. Not particularly trenchant, old fashioned, but her own gem. Her own treasure. Deep-sea fishing. Freddie had said, “deep-sea fishing, my dear Fleurette but you might have chosen one with front teeth.” Down, down, down. “Editors are, Freddie, always like that and I wanted your sonnets published.” “O most transparent Transpontine—it was your own—verses.” Verses, verses, verses. *Who fished the murex up?* Verses were the murex. They dyed all existence with their colour. Small verses, things that in no way matter. Who fished the murex up? And where, where, where? Not here. London was too fascinating. One would never write in London. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. One had lived out one life in London and there was nothing to do but listen. Feet, feet, feet—not verses. Not verses. It hurt one’s peculiar sort of sensibility to concentrate, to force into consciousness—verses. Things went on, on, on, on, on. Life was one huge deep sea and flat on its surface, merging, mingling was the business of existence. Verses. That meant diving, deep, deep, deep—*Who fished the murex up?* And where? Landor in Tuscany. Keats’ room on the Piazza di Spagna, Shelley on some wild Genoa sail boat; Byron in Athens. *Who fished the murex up?* And where? Not here, not here, Freddie. Drift and obliteration and Mavis in her green-blue and acqua-marines. Who—fished—the—murex—up? It must be late, late. Time for bed. Pull down

the wine-blue cover and unroll one's night things and sleep—sleep—sleep—bed—Army. One couldn't betray one of her race for nothing. And thou too, Brutus. Where some buried Caesar bled. Bled—bed. Army on a bed. She could see her. Bed, bled, dead. She could see Army dead. Dead for she was never alive in this milieu. She was not of this milieu. She would always be a misfit, but it didn't do to betray them. Not Jews. It was lacking in taste to betray one of the East. An Arab, a Jew. One didn't. One just couldn't. Respect for—learning. Mathematics. The hypothesis of a right-angled triangle and the lines of an Egyptian's back, the cat's eyes in the triangulated head that was a formula, that spelt something. Army spelt something. Army was a formula. Dead, alive or half-alive. Unopened, unawakened.

Martin was right. She was unawakened. She was dead.

Somewhere there rests a shelter and a bed—a bed, a bed, a bed.
Army was dead, unopened, unawakened—where some buried Caesar—

*hung still with heavy gold,
and a gilt chair I think,*

*turned sideways as one turned
fleeing the sanctum, having yearned and yearned
above a face—breathing the lotos—breath——*

Army wasn't born. She was dead. The East. The lotos of Buddha. Army was the East. One did not ask it to house-parties and insult it. One did not insult beauty and remain unscathed. Having yearned and yearned. Poor Martin. Not that one could blame him—lotos breath—

breathing the lotos breath

*of those rare flowers,
the crown and seal of death;*

crown and seal of death—crown and seal of death—lotos—forgetfulness—
island of forgetfulness—London was that—forget—feet, feet, feet, feet. "I love them all, all." Somewhat a tall order. Obeying their orders. Tell the Lacedaemonians that we lie here—we lie here—where some buried Caesar bled.

*Somewhere there rests this sanctum and this bed
covered now with the finest of rare sand,
pure as snow drifted, one more ornament,*

*dust of the rarest on that marble floor,
 O strange,
 O fair—
 I do not see that heavy guilt and rare
 over-leaf of fine gold and thinnest ware
 of honey-tinted shell-like alabaster;
 but just the faintest stirring of the air,
 moved in that place long lost
 long, long, long, gone,
 when you so tall, so proud,
 came to my room.*

So it had, so it had. Somewhere something had happened when Ermy had insisted to Marion that she would see Raymonde. It was true there were fortunes in tea-leaves. James Joyce was right. The infinitely small held infinite possibilities. Mote in one's own eye. Very well. Yes, yes, yes. Laws. But not those laws. They were made for Jews. Greek laws were rimmed on marble, rimmed in gold, laws of inflexible good taste. Helios of good taste. A god of infinite breeding. Ermy. Christ a Jew. Christ a blue incense that floated towards the roof of some Delphic temple. Christ who destroyed barriers. Thou shalt love thy enemy. A good formula. Feet, feet, feet, feet, feet. An excellent formula. Mavis in green-blue with acqua-marines. Now she could almost absolutely love her. Now she had her in perspective, had pinned her so to speak under this substance of her brain that was like a microscopic lens, that was like a telescopic lens bringing the distance near. This lens, her mind, brought antiquity near. It saw a world (James Joyce was right) in a grain, in nothingness; superstitiously in the fact that the fourth candle had burnt out, in the fact that the table needed dusting. Auguries. Helios a god of auguries, of the future. Laws of song that initiated one into laws of magic. Helios the god of necromancy. The grain of dust. The grain of mustard seed. Thou shalt love thy enemies. Yes, love Mavis. Ermy said "don't let her find out. Let her think you do really care." Ermy had said that from some depth of Asiatic wisdom. The Delian Helios was a cryptic oracle. *You ask me now to praise—*

*You ask me now to praise,
 to name her good,
 I say, "for you, for you,"
 yet let me think*

*some of my faulty phrase
savours of truth,
at least some part is true;
perhaps she might have been good*

*had she known
wisdom a little,
as we know her, sweet,
a little wisdom makes desire of love* —

*a temple and wild Love's
most passionate mood
an altar fire
within a sacred grove.*

Yet it wouldn't have done Ermy any good to have (as they say) "had" the young man. If it did do Mavis good to, so to speak, "have" him, then let Mavis. There were altars beyond altars. There were songs within songs. The song within the song. The Murex in the deep sea. Mavis moved, Syren, with the waves' motion, with no static power of her own. Perhaps her power lay in just that indecisiveness. Chacun à son goût. That moved a Syren within green waters; Syren to wreck ships. That moved within but could not dive deep. Deep through the interlayer of green that was a sort of semi-transparent huge jelly-fish that lay writhing and obscuring antiquity. Behind this world there was another world. Ermy was of it though not conscious of it. Raymonde was of it, seeing only in a half-light, in a glass very darkly. Her mind was a glass that was set between this world, this present and the far past that was eternal. A glass, a lens, a living substance lies between ourselves and our final attainment. Antiquity. It lay there. Raymonde could just not—see it. She could occasionally sense it for a moment through, so to speak, the interwashing layer of modernity that was like some octopus-like deep-sea creature, semi-transparent but never quiet. Pictures were superimposed and showed dark shadows where the outlines held. The outline of Freddie, of Lily Mount, of Mavis. Personalities at best left a shadowing outline on that substance that was modernity. Personalities at best left a false impression and even that wavering outline was blurred by other equally unimportant, equally transient impressions and the whole went on and on like some swift cinematograph. The semi-transparent substance that lay between herself and antiquity. Antiquity endured showing flashes of pure fire-blue, temple column and gold rimmed portico

behind this eternally erratic cinematograph present—where
 some buried Caesar bled. Ermy should know that but she didn't.
 Lotos-flower. The crown and seal of death. She was not alive;
 Martin was right but Martin meant it in a transient sense.
 Martin lived on that plane. Everyone did. But behind the swiftly
 turning cinematograph, lay antiquity. Blue. Lotus-flower.

*Then let me take your hand
 who know not Love's
 illegal rapture
 and his withering fire;*

*you have not lost, my sweet,
 in losing one
 another stole,
 you lose not him nor her,*

*nor Love himself
 who burns with holier rapture
 upon the altar
 which has fount of tears——*

of tears, of tears—where some buried Caesar—bled. The rose
 so regal with its splendid red, drops petals down, down, down,
 so my heart bled—no it wasn't emotion of the heart.
 It was seeing her, seeing her. Antiquity.

*I do not cull the rose
 or myrtle-flower
 from just this hour,*

*I do not lighten
 with insatiate grace
 scanning your face*

*and shine white like white ivory
 set with pure
 tuberose, some Syrian dower*

*from a small island
 where east fronts the west,
 but find this best,*

*this peace,
this lulling of satiety,
this slumber and this poignant memory.*

There was the oracle—there was the answer. Raymonde had “put it up” to the oracle. Song had answered her. Let it stand. Helios the law giver. Song within song. Going on and on and on and her eyes were blurred. Something to eat. O God the tiresome weary routine and everything coming-clear; the room coming clear, becoming more important than the half-caught rhymes, the irregular terse answer to everything. This was the absolute answer, that “hour” rhymed with “flower.” There was no law beyond this. A law of taste, good or bad. This was the answer, the law, that “dower” went with “flower” without causing offence and that *easts fronts the west* was a concise and absolute formula for her outlook. East and west. The seen and the only just not-seen. The absolute form enclosing the absolute vacuum behind it. The vacuum held and prisoned in a grain of mustard seed. “I’d count myself a king of infinite space.” Space was infinite if one’s room were small enough. Layers and layers of interweaving thought. The telephone was from another planet. No. Don’t ring. I don’t want to answer. Flower, dower. What was the answer? There were laws within laws. Who was it? But she was tired; might as well find out who it was. The metronome had stopped ticking. There wasn’t any use listening to the ticking but her heart pounded on. Why didn’t her heart just stop? Feet, feet, feet, feet. She was an instrument, must obey. Lightning rod. Why couldn’t someone else do it? Who fished the murex up? What porridge had John Keats? The Piazza di Spagna and the first almond blossoms from the campagna in February. That telephone. It was responsible for everything. A voice from outside speaking, like inspiration, like God. Laws. Flower-dower—tea leaves. James Joyce was right. Telephone. Supper. Was it too late? Was it too late for supper? No, don’t ring, telephone, don’t ring. The telephone kept jangling from another sphere. Layer on layer of emotion, of sensation were cut by that insistent intermittent and diabolic ting-ing. It went on and on and on and on. Her nerves, sweet bells jangled—stop, stop. It went on and on. It cut across the past that was (Einstein was right) the future. The past (she knew) was the future. The telephone cut across the past that was Ermy standing on a blue rug with a jet-purple thread of flowers in her hair. Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face. Laws held, laws of metre and Delphic Helios used his devote as that idiot off, off somewhere was using the telephone. The present and the actual past

and the future were (Einstein was right) one. All planes were going, on, on, on together and the same laws of hospitality held on all levels of life. Going on and on and on. That tiresome Ermentrude Solomon no doubt, possibly Marion. Darling Marion—all soft and full and young (for all she was of Raymonde's own battered generation) with her tawny hair flung back as if wired like some rather heavy yet wholesome and peony-like angel of Palma Vecchio (did Palma Vecchio paint angels?) going on and on and on. Yes, she remembered. Marion had said she would call her up to see if she had survived. Yes. Raymonde had (the recurrent miracle) come somehow through. Going on and on and on. *Who fished the murex up?* She would re-type the poems and send them to Johnstone on the *Bi-monthly*. He had asked her for poems, but probably he wouldn't like them. Not abstract enough. Not clarid nor concise enough. Perhaps she could re-work them. The telephone. "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes—Raymonde Ransome speaking." Was it too late for the mid-winter number—"Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, Raymonde Ransome speaking"—or else Stewart James might want them. People were always kind about her poetry not understanding, saying she was cold—cold—cold—Freddie saying—poor Freddie, going on, on, on, on, on—"yes this *is* Mrs Ransome—" and all the time himself really wanting to write, saying all that as if he would never come out of it, seeing all the time that the Lacedaemonians lay there and he had sent her back a song book he had "scrounged off Fritz, poor Fritz," he used to write, "poor damned Fritz he carries Liederbucher about with him and they drop out of his pockets when he goes west." That was Freddie. Not a Pickelhaube, thank God. Not that. Poor darling Freddie. "Fritz is the limit, he drops song-books and sings O Tannenbaum." That must have been the other sort of Fritz, the south—Bavarian,—O God, all, all the needless suffering. Fritz singing—songs—laws, thou shalt love—"But this *is* Mrs Ransome" bother I can't wait. Some tiresome long distance. Then it wouldn't be Marion. Should she tell them that Mrs. R. was out of town—but it was coming—a faint distant elusive and low-toned murmur—O God—"yes, my dear, so awfully glad to hear you—though I can only just, but *where* are you," bother the woman. Why wouldn't she stay put. With invidious lies. O invidious lies, invidious lies that even they might boast of who debate,—"*I am* so sorry," Ermy had asked her to be diplomatic. Invidious lies. "Yes. But where?" Invidious lies.

*With invidious lies
that even they might boast of
who debate
before the storm and sea-wind
and the great*

*bellowing of rent sails
and the inviolate host——*

“O Eastacres. No, can’t possibly. I can’t possibly run down.
I can’t really—O?”

*and the inviolate host
who sent for beauty
died before Troy gate——*

“But Ermentrude Solomon isn’t *she* with you?” Invidious lies.
“O? She left? I thought she was so keen on staying——” Invidious
lies. “I know—yes, she does seem somewhat—self—sufficing.
She wants to come in here to say good-bye, you know, is dashing
off to Florence, wants introductions. I haven’t the foggiest—
what sort of people does he want to meet? I don’t, you see,
know the woman.” Invidious lies. That sent for Beauty died,
died, died—where some buried Caesar died—feet, feet, feet,
feet—laws for which buried Caesars died must be upheld, forti-
fied. Song. Fritz went west and dropped his Liederbuch. Song,
all, all the song. The song of all, all who had died. Some buried
Caesar died. Dropped from the—

And every hyacinth the garden wears
dropped on its lap from some once lovely head.

The past was the future. Raymonde did not see Mavis in that past
that was the future. Carry on. Carry on. Carry on. Raymonde
must carry on. Mavis had other laws. Other laws. Thou shalt
love—thou shalt love—Mavis. “I am so sorry. I can’t *possibly*
come. My very dear girl, I don’t *want* to meet them.” Where
some buried Caesar bled. From some once lovely head. Hyacinths
(in imagination) had rimmed Ermentrude Solomon’s head like
a thread of scarlet. The scarlet of the crowned Christ. Ermy was
a Jew. O Tannenbaum, O Tannenbaum. Heine was a Jew. Christ
was an incense, a blue anodine. A blue incense wavering, heaven-
blue, softening laws rimmed in gold on ivory. Laws—of song.

And every hyacinth the garden wears,
dropped on its lap from some once lovely head.

Mavis' once lovely head. O, Mavis try to stay lovely. A little lovely. "My dear, I'm sorry. I can *not* come—" To keep her lovely, Raymonde must never any more see her. To keep her lovely. Mavis belonged past and past to the near past that was so much further than the so-familiar past of a just unearthed Queen Nefertiti. O Mavis of the very, very far 1917 past, stay there, stay lovely—don't obtrude, don't try to understand. Our laws are different. Where some buried Caesar bled.

"My front bell keeps on ringing, dear girl—Mrs Moss out—I can't go on—" Go on, on, on, on, on. The voice like a voice from the bottom of a very deep well. "You always are so distraught when I call up—" from the bottom of a very deep well, reaching her by a miracle from nowhere as song reached from nowhere—going—going—The thing must be cut off. Done to its death. Going—going—from a deep well and waving thin and frail hands and that one huge acqua-marine that so suited her that Guildford (was it?) had given her. All that past. Must she cut from all that past, that far, far past across a chasm that was 1917 circa, all that she loved, must she let it all, all go, fall down to the bottom of a very deep well with a voice still appealing, with a presence that would (if Raymonde saw her) re-hypnotize her into acceptance of the things she hated? Reactionary Puritan. She had found laws straighter than the laws of social Sinai. Far and far and far with hands that would hypnotize and the voice with its quaint lapses into that soft Celtic subtlety of intonation. Let it all go—let it all go—1917, Freddie, all the Freddies, to live in the real past, antiquity a blue flame apprehended thought interlayers of confusing semi-transparent sensations of modern life that were only the shadows Plato saw from a cave and called life. Modern life Plato said (circa B. C. 500) was like that. All Athens in its dying splendour had nothing to offer that was not simply a shadow seen from a dark cave. All Athens in its brilliant decadence. How much less had life now to offer? Antiquity behind antiquity had glowed like jacinth, like blue stone. The static antiquity behind the comparatively modern antiquity of Plato. The antiquity of 1917 (like Plato's transient Athenian antiquity) shone as shadow now she had made her great discovery. Mavis had helped her make her great discovery. Antiquity of modern times, the antiquity of 1917 circa was a shadow. Freddie a shadow. Like shadows seen from a darkened cave. Mavis a shadow, from some once lovely head—dropped in its lap from some once lovely head—Ermy with a

band of sacrificial scarlet hyacinths—thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face—with Tyrian blue hyacinth against—Through it all recurrent metres, through it all recurrent metres—“good-bye Mavis” but metres recurrent. She was so tired. Now she may say that I adore her face, O brave, O true. But Freddie I don’t want to write. Let someone else carry on. But Freddie was gone. No use appealing to Freddie, Freddie. It was Cret-d’y-Vau that was her inspiration. O Cret that would never answer. It was Cret-d’y-Vau more distant, more remote than all the ghostly Freddie’s, yet static, eternal like the jacinth behind antiquity. Now she may say that I adore her face—the room eternally the same, and thousands of years and interspersing civilizations but the arm-chair the same and the note book and the pencil, impl[e]ments of her trade. Now she may say—she, she, she, you have been hurt of her. Ermy had been hurt. But Ermy, love your enemies. A layer of bitter volcanic ash had been shifted, the Mavis-embittered intermediate past so that the far past of Freddie with tousled hair might remain—you have been hurt of her

*this woman, O my sweet,
finds worshipper*

This woman, O Ermy with hyacinth hair finds worshipper in me—

in me who fled her often——

fled, fled, fled, fled, dead, bled, bed. Ermy wasn’t awakened. It was not really Ermy Raymonde was writing to. It was an abstraction. It was Beauty. Dead, bled, hyacinth bled from some once lovely bed. It wasn’t really Ermy. It wasn’t really Mavis. They were abstractions. They were symbols, the symbolic Syren, Circe and the symbolic Helen standing on the walls of a doomed symbolic city that held now that Malines, Rheims and Louvain were shattered. Antiquity behind antiquity of the comparatively just-past that was so much further than the very near-past of decadent Athens. Decadent London. A city’s finest artistic flowering comes usually in its decadence. Rome. Athens. Athens. Rome. Rome. Rheims. Raymonde had fled Mavis.

But not in that superficial obvious sense. All the same she couldn’t go to Eastacres, all suave and smiling with blue transparent fruit dishes and cigarettes prolonged after coffee and somewhere the gramophone—not Eastacres. Athenian decadence. London in perspective, from the other end of a telescope, seen as far and far and far. Seen like the Athens of Plato was seen,

as shadow; London was shadow seen from a black cave-centre, the dark-cave centre of her intense critical concentration, of the intensity of the thought-shafts of her inspiration. Fled Mavis often. Blue glass transparent dishes, coloured glass dishes for salad, so pretty, all different, rose, and pale rose and blue and deep blue and green. Dishes and the gramophone—going on and on and on. Pagliacchi. From the other end of a microscope or telescope. Her mind that was a lens, that was part of the static jacinth of antiquity brought it all near, near, near, nearer than the very blue chair she (Ermy had) sat in. Far and near. Antiquity. A blue wreath of smoke that was forgiveness of sins. Go and sin no more. Sin. Sin. Sin. There were other sins. There were sins against hospitality. There was the sin of a jarring metre. Law static. Helios a god of static law and pitiless. Worship—she worshipped—finds worshipper in me who fled her often.

*She, she, she, she,—
you have been hurt of her;
this woman O my sweet
finds worshipper*

*in me who fled her often
garnering rather
leaf of the death—rue——*

rue—that wasn't what she wanted. Rue was an Elizabethan silver-slashed word. Doublets and trunk-hose and an apple-tree spilling shells of soft petal over a wall and "Romeo, Romeo wherefore art thou" in all its implication. Not Elizabethan rue, never death (anyhow) rue *in me who fled her often*—not in that sense fled her, not in any obvious sense. Sought her rather from some perversity, some double-distilled idea of loyalty to Freddie. Si j'ai parlé de mon amour. Si j'ai parlé, Freddie, of Freddie's amour. Far and far and far. Not in the obvious sense fled her often—

finds worshipper

*in me who fled her often
shunning rather
white poppies——*

white poppies, white poppies—not white poppies. There was no word-reaction that at the moment held, that clicked absolutely. There was no word reaction for just that sense of something that

might fall, might web one over, catching one's wings, something like bird-lime smeared over the surface of life, of London that she loved, everywhere to catch her, everywhere a soft web of almost invisible fibre that was none the less (to her super-refined senses) there to trap her. Death poppy. White poppy. Yes, a sort of white sticky poppy-juice. White poppy wasn't so bad. But it was not a drug offered in open treachery in a wine-cup. It was more subtle, permeating. "Come to Eastacres," Perhaps it *was* a drug so offered. Poor Ermy. All the East and all her Eastern uncanny perceptions offguard for who ever betrayed a guest? Arab, Jew. There were laws beyond laws.

*In me who fled her often
shunning rather
fumes of the poppy
than her treacherous favour——*

was more like it. Sleep fumes to dull the perception, to dull over the lightning of vivid thought that was her Athenian inheritance, that was her so-treasured inheritance from those problematic States. Perceptions like lightning and lightning flash of bird-wings flashing up, up, up to the sun of inspiration. Banal[a]ties were the real facts. Fortunes in tea-leaves. James Joyce (she had found that the advance-guard of the intellectuals was usually on the right track) was in her inmost searching mind, repudiated. Fortunes in tea-leaves. The world in a grain of mustard seed. Imprisoned in a nut-shell and king of infinite space. Bad dreams, bad dreams. Save that I have bad dreams. London was a bad dream. London was a state of paradisial drifting that would become a bad dream if she so further drifted. The Cret-d'y-Vau seemed to raise its white marble, a challenge. She didn't want to go to Cret-d'y-Vau again this winter. Ice and shale. Si j'ai parlé de mon amour. Freddie's amour. Poor darling Ermy to be so stricken. So a replica of herself of some ten years (was it as long as that?) since. So exactly herself staring (was it really only ten years ago?) at herself in a long mirror looking for a little Florentine chain of strung semi-precious stones to take the place of the amber that Freddie said didn't go with the purple. Ermy staring at Ermy. Raymonde staring at Raymonde (she had found the little string she was looking but it wouldn't fasten) in a long mirror struggling with an awkward catch to a little Florentine necklace. Freddie bending to fasten it meeting her eyes in the glass. Freddie's serious eyes in the glass, "but it will be over in three months." Three months. Freddie standing looking at her in a glass so long ago,

so long ago. Si j'ai parlé de mon amour. It was too late. It was all shattered. She must find other things, not stare and stare any longer into the crystal ball of her past, all the memories shut up in one small spherical surface, her own head, to be watched going round and round and round. Cret-d'y-Vau. She would go there. Ermy with gold roses—Raymonde had the last stanza—

*O fair, O just
see now I would prepare
a silver crown
a holy diadem,*

*no rust shall stain my sword,
it shall gleam gracious,
silver-white for her,
deadly intriguing,*

*poisonous, with power
I hated; see—I worship,
more, more, more—I love her
who has sent you to my door*

Secret Name

"But Isis held her peace; never a word did she speak, for she knew that Ra had told her all the names that all men know; his true Name, his Secret Name, was still hidden in his breast."

Hieratic papyrus of the XXth dynasty

She didn't know what it was. She could pretend to be very stupid. It was not, though, after all, a pretence: she *was*. But hardly, with her senses curiously attuned, could she in all consciousness, put her finger on the thing or the absence of the thing, a sort of ache, that made her that. Intellectuality. Brain. She thought across toward Athens. Even those twin Croton-Sybaris towns of the later Athenian decadence, even Syracuse seemed to her hard, brought to her brain, the renewing of that sense of ache. That Hellenic, avid, by way of the States, naked kind of thinking.

They were, she was indefinably Hellenic (English? American?) so that the firm-knit figure that was English, though none the less Roman, beside her in the low-seated, wicker, comfortably rounded at the shoulders garden-chair, was also a pleasant reminder that the thing, the avid ache, was gone. He said: "Yes, half the time I was on." She said: "after France, Jerusalem must have been, even if it was pretty bad, a change, somehow, for the better." Disgust twisted down the mouth. "Yes," unpleasing suffering disfigured the dark bronze, "after *France*." He let it go, turned in his chair. Blood swept back, and stained the pallor that had lashed at sudden memory. He became flippant, common in the modern manner. "The bugs were frousy. Foreign bugs are. Queer things crept out of the hay. But bugs and hay, taken all in all, it wasn't bad." He went on explaining just why he had been only half the time moulded to his mount. His horse had been frightened at a sudden turn, by a preposterous head. She visualised that face; huge befurred cobra. It was, she was sure, an exact replica of the one she too had shied at a few days ago when it had swayed incongruously, somehow seeming separated from the floating disproportionate load of firewood (its burden) bundles of untrimmed saplings that seemed, swaying above them in the narrow alley of the Cairo bazaar, mysteriously levitated. She had to shut her eyes, sure that the thing was about to swamp them, tiny old-fashioned fiacre, bright uniformed coachman, like a toy, set impractically in a built-up alley of bright striped stuffs, tent awnings, lines of lemon, blue and rose leather shoes, brasses cut and hammered.

It was real, lang[u]orous, soft, incredibly (when she opened her eyes) her first camel. "Was it his first camel?" she asked. He said it wouldn't have made any difference, they never get used to them. "It went right into his face, like that."

Rafton hunched his square shoulders, elongated his thick-set throat, animal-like, nonchalant, unconscious. He made of his sleek, just at the

edges scorched with ash, black head, the very horse's head, while the hand before his slightly protruding, well-set agate-eyes, triangulated, sudden thrust out then revolving in indolent circle, was the very camel's self. "I was off. Rolling down." He relaxed, having finished his anecdote, dark, blue-shouldered, human in the garden chair.

He had rolled down the bank, landing with the most impertinent of bumps, on the soft hammock-like awning of native cattle shelter. And the story continued with the appearance from everywhere and nowhere of rabbis, shepherd-boys, indecent children, random rabble and the evocation of curious, twisted and battered Hebraic deities. "Just like when we were kiddies" (she loathed the word not noticing he used it) "in the Bible." And he went on. "With gods," he included, in wide-sketched semicircle the white-robed, loitering blacks, the guests, spaced unevenly about the dark and unimpressed statues (Sekmet all of them) the nasturtiums edging with vermillion the sun-baked paths, "*the gods here*." She said, "I don't know one of them."

He was apparently taken in by her show of indolence. She visualised blandly, her own particular set of features gone. She thought of the lines of tortured intellectuality smudged out, graciously eliminated. "They're not so difficult." He was endeavouring to explain. She was grateful to him for his acceptance of the thing she offered. "You must begin somewhere. You choose one easy one and the others fit in, relations to it. Bes. The Wind. He looks after marriages. I don't get the connection but he's easy to remember." He turned sideways in his chair. "There's another. Cut sideways on the temples. Take that." He spoke the name. Almost he seemed to her, as he spoke, authentic, Roman, officer of one of the flashy and distinguished legions of the middle-ageing procrastinator, Caesar. It was, it seemed, another "easy" one, chosen for her beginning. "Isis."

Two palm-doves came closer. The air they walked in was thin, fine, yet not at all really in the amethyst Athenian sense, thin. It was, if it were there at all, thick rather, dusted down from heavy, rare, tropic flowers. Air if it were air at all, that held up, that supported, cloud wise. She remembered, glad to remember, for the joy of the comparison, for the realisation of this absolute emptiness where there had been an age-weary ache, that very ache, her head, that had been, so short time ago filled with fine-etched strife, with thought, with Athens. It was now the most comfortable of hollowed cups. A fine, clear, almost snow-white, and almost melting snow-like substance filled her skull; her skull was filled now with this light as with the softest of flowing substance, honey-like in quality, honey rather than wine, soothing, beatifying, not an intoxicant, not a drug, just light in which her thoughts, like those two palm-doves, padded softly.

Her thoughts, as those two palm-doves, padded softly, leaving,

as those doves, small, dainty scratches on the exquisitely dusted surface of her brain; her thoughts marked the exquisitely neat layers of her brain as those two doves marked the cool sand that drifted between the brilliant orange nasturtiums and the neat winter-verdant grass that bordered the path curves; the dogs left delicate marks on the sifted sand, of delicate, deliberate, tiny claws. So her thoughts; with a Little circular scratch occasionally, a half-circle were turquoise wing-feather or blue-grey fan of tiny tail made obsequious crescent; her thoughts wandering in this as yet uncharted region of her ivory skull, left marks; her thoughts formulating patterns, formulated finally an exact idea. She tried to speak; vanquished in the attempt, this peculiar effort, she still considered. Two realms were suspended, to be balanced juggler-wise.

Like a juggler, she considered two regions, two shining and slippery worlds, to be balanced carefully, lest one, lest the other topple her over; she must keep suspended, she must hold balanced, two exactly shaped, exactly weighted, yet mysteriously exactly antagonistic worlds. She must keep, miraculously, by very cautious manipulation, her own balance meanwhile. She must keep her own balance, like a tightrope walker, by the very use of this couple of heavy balls, these worlds, one at either end of some sort of slender balancing pole (her everyday self?) themselves serving to keep her firm, while step-by-step she must continue her difficult experiment, her prowl. She was balancing, she was quivering. Yet she was well on guard, fearful from the start, lest for every rapture of this other world, this anodine of Egypt, she might loose her slightly more familiar, hard-won, specific Attic paradise. Aware too of danger in another direction. She might so very easily, with so slight a mental faux-pas, through curiosity, mere inquisitiveness, desire to use the steel she had so hardly won, forego, past remedy, her right of entry to this just-found Egypt. On the specific prowl. She feared lest with cautious Attic brain, she might freeze at a moment of discovery. Lest at a moment where cool pulse is requisite, she might flame into some self-destructive aura.

Rafton wasn't Rafton. Any more than she was the self she offered, the slender balancing pole, her everyday self that was held static by this other pair of selves, antagonistic, as the two horses of the Platonic soul. Maybe Rafton was Rafton. Maybe, by the same token, she was herself, solely of the everyday appearance. Maybe Rafton was just what he said he was, ex-captain of the Great War, now on the way to Assuan, requisitioned by the offices of Public Works at Cairo. It might be he were totally and entirely ignorant of the things hovering, quivering in the air about them, but that, by some sort of spiritual léger-de-main, she was making use of him. That she was using something psycho-emotional in her nature. That certain physical repressions were being hulled by the presence in the low garden chair beside her. That certain spiritual forces

were being, by the same means, loosened as water may be broken into Hydrogen and Oxygen by the introduction of a third and alien element.

Perfectly, chemically, the thing worked. Fear though obsessed her. Lest perhaps lulled by this exquisite presence, her tired nerves might surrender to this. That the thing he silently and exquisitely offered might in the end upset her on her quivering tight-swung rope. On the prowl. She might so easily trip. A slight swing to the left, a slight feather-weighting to the right. One foot. The other. The two worlds swaying precariously (swaying by their very opposites) swayed herself into this very perfect realisation of herself. It was after all, like the classic chariot, this very swift release and freeing. It was so swift, so balanced. Yet she was quiet, more indolent seeming, outwardly, then he himself. She managed to find a voice. "I thought Isis was just the common Roman Venus." The voice did not startle her. It was just the sort of thing one would say to an ex-captain on his way up to Assuan on the job.

Two palm-doves came closer. The air they walked in was not the amethyst Athenian. It was pollen dusted down. From some Lydian or near Carian sunny promontory. Greece, though not of amethyst Athens was about them; temples where foam-breasted deities had learned to turn, clear, facing now their worshippers. Would the ex-captain Rafton understand? She was taking no remotest chance on this. She chose this word, the very name "Venus," insolent; insolence sullied a little, the slow drawn syllables. She said this, insolent, for would captain Rafton understand that Venus was or could be other than common? And would she not be spilling a handful of brilliant, shimmering stones, water-claris sea-stones, white yet shot with blue, blue as the star Hesperus, inappropriately if she spoke that name? *Aphrodite*, the name was a handful of stones, each syllable star-blue, crystal, flecked with light.

If he understood her proffered insolence, he returned it with indifference. He seemed only to have accepted the bare fact that she had spoken, that it was his turn to speak. "They looked pretty where I first saw them" (she knew he meant the palm-doves) "outside Lebanon." He seemed communicative. "They had some nice flowers." He continued, burst into lurid description, "as big as poppies." Anemones he thought.

They might or might not have been anemones yet the word burnt across the pallid substance of her skull. The word itself was reproduced, another element, flaming, fusing with the pollen-dusted soft and negative substance of her brain. Did he, conceivably, *know* all this? Here was her temptation. She might turn (all the bas-bleu awake in her) suddenly in her chair, make some witty, bright-voiced comment. She would perhaps surprise him, make some brilliant mental sortie, surprise him, wound him. She did not want to do this. If she could, though, only find out if he too were consciously, precariously wobbling into elements.

The palm-doves came closer. The one, more alert, hopped onto the stone flagging of the roof verandah. The pale grey was lost, obliterated, lost as a sea-gull in a grey north cloud. The aspect of the bird altered as it peered delicately for possibly fallen tea-crumbs. The square cold tiles were barren. The little bird hopped back. It joined the other, preening in the circle of yellow sand and yellow pollen light.

Her preoccupation with the birds had momentarily separated them. Something in her slightly feared, separated from him. Athenian silver, something cold, crept, north grey, across the solid substance of her brain. Athenian silver warned her. But Athenian silver must not tyrannize. Something in her refused to bow to it. He reached toward her a handful of trifles. She looked on them, a stranger.

Did she think them any good? She thought, trying even in her thought to differentiate, though she did not say so, that they looked trashy. She did not really think this. Each tiny article, the ring with the green scarab, the very, very delicate narrow bracelet, the tiny couchant charm, each held some special and peculiar power. "I suppose you know these shifty cheating Arabs. I don't suppose they'd do you." He said, "I don't know. Can anybody know?" She managed to say, "if I touched that bracelet I'd know. If it came from the tomb, it would do things to me." He said, "what things?" She said, "I don't know what things." He seemed, rock-still in his chair to expect her to take, to examine the trifles. Perversely she didn't. She knew it was perverse. She wanted to so awfully. She wanted so awfully to dip, as in a pool lined with dark rock, her narrow cold-tipped fingers in that hand. She wanted to drag up from some drowned region of human consciousness those very stones. She wanted to dive deep, deep, courageously down into some unexploited region of the consciousness, into some common deep sea of unrecorded knowledge and bring, triumphant, to the surface some treasure buried, lost, forgotten. She believed he knew all this. She suspected him of knowing all about the trinkets. She wanted to blaze out at him, "tell me, tell me who wore it at last, the bracelet?" She thought of some exquisite, incredibly slender Graeco-Egyptian, some incredibly carnal Roman. She saw etched against the pollen light those white impalpable hands and the scarab, too heavy, on that Graeco-Egyptian's slender finger. The heavy, heavy scarab drowned her in a moment, pulled her back as she strove to cling to life, in reality, to the shoulders above her, to the heavy carnal Roman. She said, "I guess we all get 'done' in the bazaars." He said, "Well, anyway, they'll do it for the folks at home." She was angry. Swift anger, for no reason, dyed her cheeks. What folks? Girls? She might brazenly have asked him. She ached now (the trifles were again safe in his pocket) a sheer unrequited physical obsession, to turn and turn and turn that tiny band that held the heavy scarab on her finger. She wanted to weigh herself, to seal herself

to him with that green curious stone, in some recognised relationship. She said, "it seems funny, the French calling a beetle a bête."

II

He seemed, on the whole, inclined to be communicative. But what, after all, on the whole, had he told her [?] He was staying in the government house. He liked the Luxor. Like her, he thought the Winter Palace vulgar. "It's only the millionaires who go there." He added, "except for a few excavators who get cheap rates." He was here maybe five days, maybe three, waiting for orders from headquarters in Cairo. He had seen her there perhaps? He showed just the ordinary come and go curiosity of the courteous traveller. She said, "Perhaps."

How common or everyday eyes were recording the scene before her. The blacks and yellows, the inked-in shadows, the out of the way sifting of sun on sand. The record left her vague, disquieted. The common form of registering impressions was, taken all in all, the most distasteful to her. Vague suspicion had unnerved. The returning twos and fours were jolting her memory, jolting her back, bringing with them keen, prickling little nagging obligations. The Thorpe-Whartons. It would happen. The girl was too insistent. The mother the naif, withered wordling, spoiled, over-sophisticated, over-educated, unperceptive. The girl had perceptions. Moreover, she was pretty. "There's that Mary Wharton you were so kind to this morning." He said, "Bob-head isn't a bad sort, if only she'd drop mama." She said, "She'll never do that." Gradually she was returning. She was perceiving in terms of the Thorpe-Wharton world. She said, "all the same, I never really thank you for helping us." He said, "it was my good luck, wasn't it?"

She had supposed it was his luck. Taken all in all, they'd all been very lucky. The carts had given out this morning. She and Mary at the last (common come and go courtesy of travellers) had forfeited their rights to places in the sandcarts to two fussy ladies. They had had to accept the two remaining donkeys. This had linked them suddenly in an unexpected intimacy. The donkeys were very bad. She and Mary had followed the sandcarts, towed solemnly in solemn low barges across the river. They were late following trail of the numerous carts, donkeys, horses, the stray barbaric motors of the very-great. Canals trickled the meagrest of yellow streams, banked with winter vegetation, green and paling branches, verdant green of the winter palms and the yellow green of last summer's blighted leafage. Iridescent birds darted to and fro above the shallow ripples. They passed the heavy unreality of laden camels.

They were left-over donkeys, not very good. Left-over Arabs, one almost blind, followed, plaguing the unwilling little animals. They turned at right angles after following a treacherous wall that seemed about to lean that fraction of a quarter-inch that would spill them with

itself down the declivity. The sandcarts jolted gaily, hopelessly, in advance. The boys spurned the donkeys suddenly into an unfenced field. Across a field, into a brake of tangled grass and date-palms. Through the tangle out into a comparatively open space marked by an almost erased foot-path. They turned suddenly across an open space of broken stones, dried flint-like quartz and mica, splintered and jagged rock, into a chasm cut between canyon-like overhanging boulders. They faced in their minds loss, annihilation. They judged (as they had been now almost two hours in this frantic jolting journey) as they turned a sharp angle about an overshadowing annihilating rock, that they were in the famous valley. The younger boy confirmed their hopes. He shouted in exuberant English, "tomb-king."

They had got ahead of the others, making time on the tangled détour, and had the satisfaction of resting in the uncanny open space of the empty stony desert. The thick shadow lay cold across them but the sun bit into their flesh, scalding them through dusty riding clothes. Their furry donkeys drooped. "Shall we dismount?" While they argued, the re-echoing of wheels from the wall of rock, announced the delayed carts. The party chattered, making words across the vacuum. The scalded rocks reflected sun and blighted waste. They trotted solemnly this time behind the carts. Lost the party immediately they rounded the last solemn curve where sudden a sheltered roofed-over space displayed, against the grave rock background, a covey of exquisite tiny creatures, the red tasselled, gaily harnessed donkeys (some thirty or more) of the fortunate early starters. Their meagre, left-over little mounts joined the gay assembly, were provided straightaway with fodder while she and Mary strode violently off toward the sudden bizarre gathering that swarmed about the entrance, they pre-supposed, of the tomb. Tourists of every description, workers in various métiers, draughtsmen, reporters, cinema and plain cameramen. They saw the first wheel emerge, theatrically perfect, a made-up gold wheel, it almost seemed, a property wheel, so perfect in outline and colour, a golden thing, from death.

They followed the posse of native soldiers and the white priest-like Arabs who carried the laden tray across the open bare space from the tomb entrance to the modern shelter beyond. The heat had turned them dizzy. They stumbled half-consciously toward the first convenient shade, the open mouth of the subterranean passage. A group of tourists preceded them. "We must see this tomb." It was Mary's common sense. "I left my guide book with mama." She followed in confidence the hearty back of the last member of the party. They entered the burial chamber of King Amenophis, the Second.

Humility made them at ease, one with another. An Arab crouched at the head of the dainty the flight of stairs. Groping in the dusk they managed the first flight. Terror seized her. She must turn back.

Common sense preceded her. "Wonderful the lighting of these old tombs with real electricity." A tiny familiar electric bulb glowered overhead. So might God light them over hell through death. Common familiar electricity. "This all along, is pieces from the Book of the Dead." The hearty back was apparently perusing his Baedeker. There was something in this; grit. She mustn't be outdone by mere common or garden nerve. She sought frantically for baksheesh for the crouching Arab. If she could get him baksheesh all would evolve itself, be right. The warm monkey-like palm reached upward. Some sort of serpent sibilance calmed her like the hypnotic siss-siss of some beatific serpent. Had God admitted her? Was it things like this, signs like this, like Charon and his toll, that theoretically bound us? She felt, having paid this unrequired toll, that some guardian was provided. That this Arab, protective, was some psychic guarantee. She stood, at last, Down the last of the dainty minute steep stairs, in the clear-lit chamber of the dead.

She remembered all this in etched images as the other external things were being, by some sub-conscious process, shifted back to consciousness. The absolute essence of her underground experience was that the long graceful figure stretched in state in the centre of the minute and exquisite palace-tomb, was some potent opal. Long, oval with the exquisite contour of some huge and polished gem, it lay as it had lain for some four thousand years. It had obtained, by sheer permanence, a cryptic power. It rested now, a symbol etherealised, black opal, from which if one persistently gazed (she was sure) small cloud-like dark images would emerge, as from a darkened crystal, small images from the past. The gilt of the tiny palace room was as if laid on yesterday by some skilled quattro-cento craftsman. Delicate vine and exquisite leaf, tiny minute pattern of barge and serpent, above all, minute and exquisitely etched stars on blue. An almost too modern glitter one might have said, as if these tiny things needed only age to convince one of their authenticity. Age should have sullied them, they had not even ripened into dignity. They were small and dainty toys, small and innocent, with all the glitter of a child's tree ornaments. The long dignity of the body raised on its dais alone convinced her that this was a death-palace beneath the earth. Yet even the body, sublimated, had become some exquisite gem, black opal, a toy in the larger sense.

The elegant minute star-chamber of the dead was a fine separated memory. It rested as a moon opal on the centre of her forehead, a gem earned, in some mysterious sense by sheer grit, by the sheer physical nervous energy that have driven her to Egypt, through storm, through penury, that had driven her that two ferocious hours across the tangle and outlying waste of Thebes into the straight heart of the Theban desert. That had driven her by sheer nervous force and by sheer subduing of subconscious terror down those four sets of tiny stairs.

Almost it seemed an initiation of some sort; the memory as of an opal pressed against her forehead. It would burn there dark, substantial proof of her inheritance.

It was there for all time separated from the ice and rock of Attic promontories. So far separated one end in time as Mary Thorpe was the other. The attic promontory was in the middle with the basalt, moon opal one end, with modernity, New York, Mary Thorpe the other. She swung between them, daring all three because of the presence beside her. The ex-captain belonged to all three, but lest he should think her "odd," lest he should think her "queer," she valiantly pursued her plan of indolence. Did he think she was one of the frivolous Thorpe party wintering in Egypt? What did he think her? He had said over the Rest House lunch table, "Are you New York or London?" He had coupled them, herself and the so different Thorpe child, in his glance. Mary had said, "New York," at the exact moment that she had answered "both."

How long could she keep this up? She couldn't conceivably keep it up forever. He was going to find her out and soon. If he wasn't (as she in some region of her unchartered brain, suspected him) already weighing her in adequate dimensions, in separated and differing worlds as she was weighing him. She suspected him of the worst. He had some power. She knew he had, suspected him, feared for it. Hoped that he hadn't, wished that he had. For how disastrous, after all, if he should turn out the most, most ordinary of ex-captains merely on his way up to Assuan on his job.

She must come back to it, back to him. She said, "we never really thanked you." She was coupling, in her thought, herself and Mary Thorpe as he had done in his glance across the table. "We'd have been cooked to a cinder in that climb. I had no idea, when we left the others to drive the long way, that the short was so devastating. It was decent of your dragoman to take us on." But before he had framed his answer (it was his turn) things were all distorted, broken. Groups met and separated. The last of the last of the returning parties appeared laughing, hysterical with fatigue. She must speak, say something, manage actually to thank him, "I'm glad we didn't do the Ramaseum on the way back. But it was good of you to insist on Hatshepsut." She recalled the frieze of delicate tinted reliefs. The cool reaches of the stone porches of Der el-Bahri. It was a cool honey-coloured, columned structure, pleasantly of a scheme of consciousness to which Pompeii belonged, to which certain vistas of unvisited Asiatic cities. "We'd have never gone to Der el-Bahri. I was too tired." She recalled the rescue of the Baedeker solemnly, conscientiously by Mary, as the Thorpe ladies appeared cool, in grey veils, just as they themselves finished coffee. She herself had wanted to drift, to dream on into the afternoon but Mary was too quick. They found themselves like common or garden tourists in the open, in the free,

organised and recognised consciousness, wandering through the honey columns and the Pompeii-like chambers of the Temple of Hatshepsut. It set against the upreach of the Theban hills in some familiar Greek fashion. "The Ramaseum would have been hateful, I thought, even I persuaded Mary to think, hateful and Roman after Der el-Bahri." She was talking against time. The groups evolved into hateful prickling little nagging obligations. The Thorpe group especially. She could almost hear the voice, with its faint twang, its high-pitched modulation, its slight under-drawl of affected sophistication. "Mary child, do look, there's your clever Mrs Fairwood, like any other human female, oggling, simply, that nice Englishman, who helped you find the Rest House."

III

"Let's go and get my photographs." In his stupid, quiet way, he seemed to sense disaster, threatening her. Coloured, differentiated like croquet balls, the various guests of the Hotel Luxor returned from the tomb at Thebes or various outlying excursions; red, green, yellow, grouped in wooden meaningless clusters, yellow, green, black across the length of paved piazza, about the patches of winter-verdant grass. White, for the most part, with a vivid differentiating band, scarlet, red, green, she didn't understand their croquet-lawn babble. She didn't want to enter into their mamas and their various clustered, croquet-ball coloured stupidities. "The Ramaseum was *some* place." It was an English voice trying, in the vulgar modern manner, to be American. The owner of this particular voice must be very young. It was probably Jerry Corke—no that wasn't it—Jerry whatever-his-name-was who was Mary's latest discovery. "Say, Mrs Fairwood," it was the actual Jerry who had made the informal fourth at the Rest House lunch, who accosted her, American and all, "why didn't you and Miss Mary here stay and see the Ra-ma-se-um[?]" He was being very funny. She answered, in his own lingo, "gee, it was too hot."

High, silver, ice-clipped, Mrs Thorpe's laughter, ice-on-lemonade-glass laughter, followed as they stepped from the paved verandah into the garden. It wound meaningless. It cut, ice-and-lemonade civilisation, meaningless through the air, wavered near the cat-faced Sekmet. Against the purple of the flowering bougainvillea it was smothered.

"Gee, Mary has some mother." It was Rafton who now continued the feeble joke. There was a continuity now. A sort of secret service bond between them all. Mary, young Jerry whatever-his-name-was, herself and Rafton. This was the New York that couldn't in the march of civilisations be brushed aside. They were bound together now in sympathy, in a sort of sous-entendre of tenderness toward Mary, sensitive, perceptive, against Mary's vain, over-educated mother. "The trouble is those women have no chance." She was defending

Mary's mother. "They're spoiled from birth." He said, "that's no reason for her spoiling things for Mary."

Modernity, ice-on-glass civilisation, Mrs Thorpe's high-pitched laughter, modernity, Babylon re-terraced between reaches of the Atlantic and the giant Hudson, modernity, client to the heavy drapery of the purple bougainvillea that hung background for the cat-Sekmet. The cat-Sekmet smiled its cat-whiskered smile, its smug basalt smile against the down-weight of the heavy purple scentless flowers. Shadows of the palms were blurred in the sand path. Two tiger creatures, Sudanese lion-cats howled derisively across the ice-in-lemonade brittle laughter of Babylon-New York. She stooped before the wooden bars of the low cage. The cats prowled and tugged resentfully at silver chains. They rattled the fine, massive silver. She wanted these cats. "Whose are these cats?" He supposed one of the officers, there were a couple of new ones at the government house, he didn't know them all, they were always back and forth from the Sudan. She said, "I want a cat like this." She clenched her hands against the dusty riding things she was still wearing. It seemed the uttermost of imagined bliss to feel the tension of that cat-lover claw that was reaching, reaching out from the wooden bar, that was curled (bronzed cat-paw of some unearthed and priceless treasure) against the fine sifted sand of the broad garden space. He said, "You'd better come to Assuan with me."

She stood, shoulders squared slightly below his, again. She faced, down the vista of the sand-strewn path, the garden door, that opened out into the highway along the Nile. The door was exact frame for the patch of road which past casual donkey-boys in fez and blue, red or brown garment, casual dragomen, tall, sun-burnt, casual croquet ball attired English or Babylon-New York. Casual donkeys. And behind the stone strip of separating wall, the river. Yellow, with one umber square-set sail.

She stood a moment in the gate before the stone that marked the threshold of the gateway, the stone that differentiated the road sand from the finer strewn carefully swept garden path sand. The flat stone divided the roadway with its sifted, beaten, trodden, donkey-trodden, sand-shoe trodden, boot and bare-foot trodden sand from the so ceaselessly swept sand of the garden where they still stood. The whole desert was held in check, it seemed, by some indefatigable Arab's broom. The howl intermittent of the lion-cats. She bent her head suddenly backward with darkness across her eyes. Night premature, momentary, self-imposed darkness was sudden across her eyes. She shut her eyes for the premature savouring of the night, violet swift, that was in one second about to fall, black pall across the temples, the tombs, the donkeys, the donkey-boys, the croquet balls of London and New York. In the thick, self-imposed blackness she sensed a new

fragrance. An installation ever so subtle that caught and wound. Across the space, re-lighted by her wide open stare, a white flower-cluster flashed, subtle, intangible in her brain. Some subtle tiny flower; jasmine? A tiny star-cluster of minute bloom hung tangible, phosphorescent, Greek. Across the bar of the garden gate, a tendril pulsed like the flowers that (in the Anthology) dropped tears upon the Lover. She stepped out across the slab of stone. She found herself wandering with Rafton in the onrush of the evening.

She was making remarks that she believed in no way betrayed her. She didn't want him to know of these constant aberrations, these psycho-hysterical visionary sensations. Lest he should think her "queer," lest he should think her "odd," she continued pitter-patter of a sort. She kept on wondering if any dynamic burning splendour of emotion could have anything more pertinent to offer than this mere comradeship, was anything to this paradisal sort of thing, this sort of friendly, adequately accompanied friendship along a greying river. The river greying, by some curious effect of reflected splendour, became in a moment, the most luminous of River of Revelations gold. The Nile flowed now straight into her imagination, as he would have said, "just like when we were kiddies" (though she hated the word, she would never have noticed that he used it) "straight out of the Bible." It had been, just a flash of a moment before the agate-intaglio greying, the tawniest of yellows, that flowed Arno-wise, sandy, gritty, sand-coloured. Now the sandy lionine grit-colour, the intermediate glass grey, the river of Revelations gold were again merged into a fourth, another grey, this, violet, soft and luminous. The hills the exact moment the sun dropped, startled forth, cut of paper cardboard, a medium sized array of goodish hills, hardly, when measured in memory by Apennine or Alp, to be termed mountains.

The evening's paper cardboard drop of dramatic painted hills, flung the rest of it into sordid low relief. The white double circle of stairs and the raised roof garden like piazza of the Winter Palace Hotel, seemed an unreality made up of paper cardboard too, but paper cardboard painted in; tentative, experimental to be brushed aside. She forced herself to confess this as they came to a final pause above the quay steps where the house-boat "Hatashoo" (so they simplified Hatshepsut) just arrived from below Cairo, was tethered. "They must be dressing for dinner," she remarked, as she and Rafton leaned on the stone parapet. Below, the house-boat with all the paraphernalia of a domestic world afloat, gave forth shuffling sound of Arabs swinging brooms along the deck to the beat, beat, hypnotic of their song. "Fancy praying Allah to attend one while one dusts one's bedroom." Yet the trivial remark seemed meaningless. Everything in them seemed that. They were all (weren't they?) paper cardboard, paper dolls, croquet balls?

"We're all nothing here." She kept on with her pitter-patter. He said, "You're disappointed in it." She could not say, could not cry with uplifted dynamic hands, with a ring of old, old sincerity, some atavistic inheritance, "but here, but here—" what words would come to her overstimulated brain should she begin to butter one shadow of the burning, furious love, the furious burning that was in her?

"No not that, but everything seems painted,"—she did manage it—"cardboard." He said, "you mean you seem to have seen all this before? But it's on everything, cigarette boxes, posters in the underground; cigarette boxes, magazine ads." She said, "yes, magazine ads."

They turned beneath the double circle of stairs before the Winter Palace. She had meant to tell him. She had meant to say, "this filthy Winter Palace. You know every day for all the meagre days I've been here till to-day, I was penned in that lower hall." She meant to tell him about her work, to make him know what this had meant, this morning's freedom, even this few hours' evening escape. She didn't tell him. She let him go on explaining the difference between Isis and Hathor, Osiris and Nub. The stone cow placed at the end of the road, marking the promenade path along the wall from the broader roadway, he was telling her was Hathor. "That circle in its horns is some symbol." She let him go on in his soft London voice, let him go on, saying things that were the very primer of myth and saying them to her, of all people, with conviction. He must never, never know of that round half dozen terrible little articles that had got her here. Terrible, intense, erudite and in their limited way, illuminating and terribly right.

But, O, for all her heavy and weary research into Graeco-Roman texts for those tiresome facts, for authentic and tiresome information on lost fragments, wearisome notes for Bodge-Grafton's monumental and final volume (to be slightly, in the light of the new Tutankhamen excavations, modified) wrong. The party's personal disappointment (Bodge had been called back to Cairo on some trivial business, some trivial jealousy or misunderstanding with the Egyptian faction) had lifted from her, a weight, she particularly now with the Theban hills gone violet, repudiated. The weight of all her own wearisome and grinding labours. She must forget that now. Lest this evening light should be (if only for the moment of her speech) sullied by alien suggestion, she kept silent. She would paper-doll it further. Wasn't he, Rafton at her side, in his correct blue clothes, with his well-set ex-officer bearing, a male compliment of herself, swinging along in riding-things with face bronzed a little over its pallor? The whole paper-doll situation would be ruined if she were, even for a moment to spoil this onrush of violet, if she were to prod into its graciousness with solid truth. She might say, "I'm a sort of high-class experiment of Bodge-Grafton's." Perhaps he had never heard of the famous Egyptologist.

She might add, "he didn't want one of his own or Miss Surry's pupils. He wanted someone crafty and singular, but outside his immediate crowd. He found me through a friend." By some tic of fate she knew a little of a dull subject and had had some experience inputting notes together. Scholarly high-brow sort of journalistic experience. She didn't say, "I'm a sort of high-class secretary, under-paid, but it got me here."

Perfectly, chemically, the thing worked. But it didn't matter now how it had worked, how it had come about. There were apparent various reasons for her blitheness, for her *laissez-aller* of all things highfalutin, Bodge-Graftonish and Athenian. She wouldn't have it here, the high-brow secretary; conversely also and absolutely, she wouldn't have had it here *save* for the high-brow secretary. She knew, kicking the sand and dust as as a child she had kicked New Jersey sand stretches, that it would have been to her no possible use whatever, if she hadn't first proved to herself its worth. She had proved to herself, perfectly, chemically the thing, and the thing perfectly, chemically established was now done with.

She wasn't going to flick chariot horses of the soul. She had stepped out from a chariot, in some race where she had vanquished. She had stepped out, unknown, apart from the crowd of intellectuals; she was out. She had done her bit. Bodge had gone to Cairo with his disappointed party. She was free.

"I'm only here a few days longer, I guess." She didn't really know how much longer she was here. Vaguely, Bodge had sketched a few left over pages to be re-typed for his next article. Vaguely, she had some vague small duties. Things that didn't now with the night's journey to Cairo, separating them, matter. Vaguely Grafton had generously signified with a wave of a thin fine, indubitably in the French sense, *fin* hand, that she might possibly, should occasion demand, take the five days trip to Assuan. The general information she might (with her low-paid high-strung wits) accrue, might vaguely later prove of use to him. Well, anyhow, Bodge was friendly. He knew the amethyst Athenian values.

They stopped again under the arch of the hotel garden gate. Above their heads the intolerable jasmine spilled the East. Huge pearls, pearls priced above price. She had thrown it all away for this. For this the amethysts of Athens. For this the olive and the polished silver of a victor's wreath. It didn't matter, the brain; ambition and achievement didn't matter. He reached to her the little photographs he had just now stopped at Gaddis Seif's to ask for.

Black opal, that was her experience in the tomb. It lay now, mysterious in her thought, beside this Eastern pearl. But she couldn't forget it. He wouldn't let her forget it. Black opal, pearl, mystical, jewels of some far-distant atavistic racial inheritance. A beggar's garment and two jewels, above worth, hidden in the brown folds. That was the East.

That was her inheritance. Why then, should Captain Rafton as she breathed in her nostrils the breath of that beyond-price jasmine, bring her with a jerk, back? Why the everlasting and eternal chariot?

It was there in her outstretched hand, the roll of badly pressed, still damp photographs (he had taken the snapshots this very morning). The present, this badly drying, up-curling little grey print, the very-present, the picture already familiar to every reader of the *Daily Mail* in misty London. The very photograph, it seemed, that she had already boringly a hundred times turned from on the backs of other people's newspapers on buses, or on the Metro. "It's on everything," he was right, these symbols ran now through everything, "in the underground, on cigarette boxes."

She handed him back the photographs, the general familiar lot of them. This one persisted, bringing, in its little grey shadow the reality, the very golden wheel that this morning she with Mary Thorpe had watched born, brought to birth, brought back after four thousand years, to light. The very chariot wheel, gold, too gold, not even with the softness of some Mycenaean or Grecian burial to tone it down, to give it semblance of antiquity. The tiny modest print brought to her senses the memory of that wheel, gold against the grey stones of the last stairway of the Tomb.

He said, "this one is particularly good. I got it standing just above the cinema crowd, luckily as the chariot wheel was brought out." The wheel was brought out, one wheel to be fitted to the gilded body of a conqueror's, of a king's chariot. Drawn by horses, fine thin steeds with braided manes fitted, with rare fine thin harness. Streaming out, those fine twisted or braided tresses, the wind about them, their tiny heels, so exquisite, so fine, so indubitably in the French sense *fin*, plying fine sand, fine dust, dust precious as sifted gold, the dust that for four thousand years had lain, still lies on the highroads of Egypt. The very dust she stood on. Her soles, the soles of her very feet must see, must feel, as if eyes, octopus-wise, set there, could plunge beneath the sand surface to the subterranean chambers, the minute death palaces. Beneath her feet (unshod, unluckily, with eyes) this very afternoon, perhaps tiny minute star-chambers (had eyes been there) might easily have been revealed. There were minute star-chambers no Carnarvons had penetrated. He said, "do you feel better than you did in the Tomb?" Was he in some god-game manner guessing thoughts? "How better?" "Bob-head told me you almost fainted." "Nonsense. It was that curious stifling. I just said I didn't envy royal visitors who had to stand attention before mummies. I just said it was good to feel one could leave any moment. She thought I looked ill. It was the first excitement."

He waited, not putting the little bundle of damp, upcurling prints back into his note-book. He said again, "this one is particularly good."

He meant her to take the print. She couldn't take it, any more than she could have asked him a half hour ago to turn and turn and turn that green, curious beetle on her finger. Something in the air possessed her.

She was behaving gauchely, self-consciously, like a gauche and awkward school-girl. In her fine drawn speculations she was in danger. She was in danger, slender balancing pole, of loosing, in the very torment of this balance, the whole clue, of standing frozen, nullified. Each self so accurately measured, each given, in such *bas bleu* justice, its exact amount of personal attention. She was in danger of nullifying herself by her over-subtlety. Here was Captain Rafton with the little print, a generous simple fellow, a good-looking slightly war-battered individual, to whom she could so simply in such *bonhomie*, with a gallant gesture, reach out boyishly her thin hand, say: "thank you, let me have it. I will remember always and always, when I get back to London and my work, this and you." She could do that and he would understand. She could on the other hand, in a subtle gentle way with her soft drawl, in her own mysterious manner, just intimate that there was something other—different—something not comradely; other. Something of which the white star-jasmine, spilling white wine and light still above her head was the so-fit symbol. She nullified herself. Neither spoke. She stood gauche, nullified.

Tourists returned jostling. That was a third world, the world of the everyday appearances; she was in danger of loosing even that world by her eternal subtleties. Even the everyday world that made her start, self-conscious, awkward as any nurse-maid caught chatting at a gate, when the party of Oxford (was it?) college mates of Grafton's paused excited in the roadway. It was the ungainly older hoy, the boy with the yellow hair, the unpleasantly burnt skin, the too-blue eyes who shouted out to her, "they've got him actually." She stood, nonchalant; as member of Bodge-Grafton's suite, she would be expected to answer, to say the right thing; she waited, "actually, found the old boy." (He meant obviously King Tutankhamen.) He didn't in his hysterical excitement notice her appearance. Others meeting, parting, shambling dead, dead weary in the road dust greeted, parted. The excitement of the Tomb was unreal, hysterical.

Rafton turning to go, flung over his shoulder, "you will come then, it's the last night of the moon, to Karnak. I'll be round about eight." Something had bewitched her. She stood dead silent, frozen, when she wanted to shout out, "but God in heaven, man, I'm tired to death. How can I drive with you to Karnak, moon or no moon (anyhow, it was really full last night) after this afternoon's fearful disintegrating ten miles jostling in the desert?"

IV

It was like the Athenians, she thought as she drifted through the dusk, back across the Egyptian garden, across the now quite blurred-out shadows of palms that waved tenuous, fernlike in this space between sunset and uprising of the giant moon; it was utterly Athenian starkly to define, to outline in terms of thought every human emotion, not making allowance for this intermediate state where shadows of bronze palms were soft and fern-like, where thought and emotion were delicately merged. Thought and emotion merged delicately now that she had let go, or now that her very evident fatigue had let go for her, that stark analytical hold on things of emotion, on things of intellect. Fire-flies (she couldn't help feeling) should have darted up, hung between her and the smudged-out smile of the oblong, seated cat-Sekmet, a veil, glimmering of dancing frenzied stars.

There was no glimmer or veil of fire-flies, nothing moving save the tireless groups, that still formed, re-formed, chattering on the piazza that was lit now by the dim squares from even spaced window and wide open front door. She escaped, had turned triumphant the bend on the first broad landing when she was caught, held electricized, electric, answering electric quality of tense speech, of slightly rasped emotion. Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton. There was nothing to do but to meet her alert, bright-witted, enthusiastic. It was a sheer sub-conscious reaction, the only thing that could save one, the uttermost of polite inanities, a brisk, a breezy, "what dressed already." Then the swift turn on the broad landing and the last run of stairs and into the shelter of her room. It did not, however, work. Mrs. Thorpe was answering with other than a bright and winsome smile, her brisk and breezy, "what already dressed and *what* a pretty scarf," with "my dear, rescue me." When spoiled women of the Thorpe-Wharton denomination, say, in that tone, "rescue me," it might mean anything, from sewing on their shoe buckles, from helping them with "my dear that hopeless hook under the arm, you know, one can never reach it, these dress-makers are all beasts," with actually buying her tickets or tipping her porters as "my dear you know, what a quarter or a shilling comes to or should I tip them more (or less) you are so clever, all this extremely (how can they bear it?) dirty foreign money," or even, "my dear, that little" (in order to impress some doddering army colonel) "list of simplified hieroglyphics."

Curiously it wasn't any of these things, it never was the one thing one expected; it was, "such charming people, I met them first at my coming-out ball, my mother was you know one of the old Lee-Raymonds of Baltimore, and it isn't as if they were ordinary people." There was nothing for it but to adapt a sort of patent leather shiny expression, meaning nothing, meaning, "God why won't they ever, American women of that class, let you constat for yourself *who* their mother was and *why*."

There never was nor could be any letting you find out for yourself the why and the who of themselves, their relations and the variegated relationships. She must tell, and tell everybody, everything. Why? When there was patently no mistaking for one moment the type, respectable, thwarted, fast. Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton would be, to the very edge of discrimination, respectable yet to the very limit allowed by her particular set, fast. She would do and say things that would shock a Parisian street-walker and remain under the latest tint of lip-stick, so very innocent, so pouting, so intimate, so appealing. Her appeal must be appeased; otherwise there could be no telling what revelation would come forth, the eternal Southern touch, that "my mother's mother," when it was no doubt the father who was responsible for all that was forthright, virile, amazing in that too common type. Probably the father of this particular Mrs. Thorpe Wharton had made his "pile" in flour, lumber, not pork, but something middling west. It was that gallant strain in Mary. Mary wasn't of this glue and lip-stick appeal. It was Mary (she gained) that the mother was referring to; now she must listen, she was caught for they had finally, after one or two swift turnings on meandering tracks (very hare and hounds the conversation zig-zagged) got somewhere. But where? She tried again with her hound-brain to follow the amazing monologue, to cut the thing off at an odd corner, to cut across it and so to have done. To track it to death. Not for any pleasure it was giving her; she had heard all this before, on boats, from her own family, from any American, tantalizing with sympathetic appeal, with glue of tangled labyrinthine confidence. "It was his Uncle Henry." However did that come in? She couldn't afford to go back, to lift the veil (she had thoughtlessly let fall) of indifference, in order to spur this confidence to its death gallop. But it all ended. "So you see, it would hurt them, and myself of course too; my dear, for naturally it's nice to talk over those days when one actually was, though you, my dear, would never believe it, almost (now you see I'm boasting) one of Baltimore's (dare I say it) well, actually, prettiest debutantes if I didn't (surely you will understand?) accept. And it was so rather charming of them to recognise me so quickly, for surely after these many years, one does (doesn't one?) so horribly alter? With a great girl, like Mary, too, to give one away even if occasionally people do say—" "But" (Helen Fairwood had to end it somehow, it had to be done, and swiftly, to its death, this trail of reminiscence across which that mouth made its red appeal like the very hunted quarry, never letting one forget the wounded tenderness, the sensitiveness, the very woman that she was) "but of course, how obvious, one wouldn't say Mrs. Wharton you were Mary's sister. One just wouldn't. It's so obvious one just wouldn't remark on it at all." "Beast," Mrs. Wharton struck across the shoulder of the rough riding coat with her brisk little hand, making just such an appeal to her

protectiveness as she must be hourly, daily making to Mary. "How you do tease," and having settled to her own satisfaction herself and Mary's evening, she was off, looking, as viewed from above, surprisingly youthful, with neat pinned-round bright hair and supple gesture.

No, she wasn't the stupid, obvious type, that would bob her head in imitation of her daughter's school friends. She was more subtle, more devastating. It would be with pout, "but I'm getting beyond that sort of thing," and then annexing all young Mary's dance partners with a simple taken-for-granted sweetness. Confiding to the men too, "my baby, Mary, Maryland, what do *you* make of her? Girls nowadays are brusque; Mary only likes queer people, or O, such awfully dull ones."

"O, such awfully dull ones." Well anyhow, she knew this flirtatious little rencontre on the stairs was by way of an amendment to what she, Mrs. Wharton, had pre-conceived her attitude to be, the attitude due to Mrs. Fairwood. She had modified her manner. It would probably have been the same, that of the worldly not quite sure of herself American on European shores, not quite sure lest she should make a mistake, "my dear, you know over here the whole attitude to working women differs." Over *here*. She would have taken on the face value the fact that Mrs. Fairwood was a secretary, something of the sort, "or is she actually one of them?" But having seen the little duet on the grey stone flagging of the piazza, having set Mrs. Fairwood in another category, "my dear, actually oggling," discovering in spite of presumed cleverness that this secretary something-of-the-sort, *was* a woman, and anyhow, moreover a woman attracted to her own Mary (a double rift in the armour) she would be free of her, with her, make use blatantly of her. Not that that mattered.

Helen Fairwood was fond of the girl Mary. But what modification of the simple subtle evening, she had in spite of herself all unconscious, through that dusk grey garden, been imagining. She wouldn't with her thought have sketched it in, the slight tentative reluctance with which underneath, something free in her, something not of the intellect was mapping out for her the dress, the manner. She wouldn't with her thought have sketched herself in blue, with her hair done soft about her too thinly Flemish forehead, nor the very blue, blue collar of bluest stones, one of her rare few treasures that was to bind her throat where so far only the rough collar of her riding shirt had chafed and let start forth the meagreness of thin fine face. She was in the un-Athenian dusk of the blurred over Luxor garden, making deep down a web, a fine and subtle surprise for Captain Rafton when in dinner-jacket he should step across the threshold of the door, searching along the couches and the little coffee tables with obvious well-bred toned-down surprise when the blue, blue slim creature with the heavy blue collar of blue stones should rise, "*you*." She was planning this, in the spider part of her subconsciousness,

all this, but her brain had not recognized the plan, had only starkly qualified the empty spaces of the garden with some image, "there should be, why aren't there, knots and star jewels of flaming fire-flies?" Her brain had formed that precise image but her spider self was weaving, weaving down, down the very, very self she was to offer. It was only now that she, off guard, found that she had promised to look after Mary, that the picture came, obtruded, and a strange, very human heartache, a loss answered her, "fool, you let these women twist you round their fingers. You think yourself not one of them. Spider fool. You weave more devastating webs than any." No, she wouldn't let it come true. She had her back up. She wouldn't let her evening be spoiled by any rash promise to a vulgar woman she had only just met, who because her daughter had worked up a little intimacy, was taking for granted, complete acceptance, complete, on her part, servitude. Any English woman would have known, seen (as Rafton had so clearly seen) her place, her position, slight yet definitive. She wasn't going to let in this little Baltimore parvenue (for after all she was that) interfere.

V

However when Mary did knock finally on the door (it was after dinner and her mother had no doubt pre-arranged the matter) there was nothing for it but a stimulated, cordial, "but *do* come in," and further having so far committed oneself, to add, "my child, forgive this tatterdemalion rag and old bone atmosphere. I had packed so carefully thinking I would never need, with Mr. Grafton, any but just working clothes, and now suddenly my fineries are lost, buried under note-books, hot-water bottles, you know, all the trappings." She was dressed and knew from the startled tilt of the girl Mary's fine chin a premonition of what was about to happen to the Captain when he should stroll, in dinner jacket, searching coffee tables, settees in the lower hall, "what, *you?*" In well feigned surprise, hadn't she in that spider consciousness practiced it? Hadn't she now, jolted by Mary's mother on the stairs, brought the entire plot right forward into her thoughtful brain, recognised, accepted it?

"You do—look—nice—in—" "Yes, yes," she brushed aside the girl's apparent admiration with the most careless of sophisticated, world weary little gestures, "blue *is* my colour." They had thought her, in rough coat and skirt, in shirt open at the throat and huge pockets, in shantung, properly Egyptian coat and skirt, in panama hat over her eyes, and with, note-book and guide-book, the very acme of what a secretary should be, or must finally in the rush and enthusiasm of notes and discoveries, become. The girl Mary's tribute, she rejoiced to see, was unforced. The mother, later, must have a shock too. Pretty, gregarious, yes, she would one evening deliberately make a "set" at Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton's latest colonel. No, no, no. It was unthinkable.

This was really silly, it was the girl Mary she was, in all conscience, after.

"It's some blue beads, not beads exactly, a lumpy sort of collar, I'm looking for." She had found the thing, she had all the time known it was there, exactly there, tucked away under a soft wadge of underclothes, ribbons. Let Mary see what secretaries managed to secrete under boyish open at the throat shantung "waists."

She spoke to the face (her own) in the oval little old-fashioned house-party mirror reflected with the flare of two dim candles. It was a thin boned thing (the bones softened in the flare of English house-party candles) that opened thin lips at her utterance and she lost track of the present, of the Captain perhaps waiting now below stairs (was she as tired as all that?), of the girl seated just behind her, that young strong, pretty forthright little barbarian whom nevertheless, she addressed, speaking as well to the other, that thin boned thing, "O why, since you come from Manhattan, do they call you Maryland?" It made a little song. The blue collar having fastened with a satisfying click, firm, falling lowish on her throat, heavy, a blue collar, but low so that the thin bones, were hidden and the throat rose thin as some fine stem to some white flower, she repeated it, stressed it, exaggerating the unintentioned metre, "O why since you come from Manhattan do they call you Maryland?"

"I don't" Mary was sure to say, did say, "come really from Maryland, it was at school because mother had relatives—" no doubt. She could see "mother" in Canadian martin, in strung pearls, in a black or dark blue chiffon, telling the headmistress (the "principal" it would have been) all about herself and Mary. But it was far; too near, however, with the girl opposite her. This was Egypt. America had been wiped out, she had thought, even before the heavy down-weight of London five war years. Before the down-weight even of London five war years. But it wasn't. It stared at her in an English country-house bedroom, in a New England seaside village bedroom with four-poster draped with white of mosquito gauze, with strip of rug, and pottery Devon-like jugs, in Egypt, here in Egypt across her room in Luxor, America, herself gazed, as in the mirror a moment since at herself. It faced her, herself, her own school; names. "Mother's mother was a—" she couldn't bear to demean herself, to be other than the Mary she had in her mind, in her affection even, made her. No, Mary could not say, any more than she, herself some fifteen years ago could have said, "mother's relatives" (why was it always *mother's* relatives?) "were, you know—" No, no, Mary wasn't saying it. She faced too apparent a blank, a tabula rasa. There was nothing hardly of Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton in that frank child gaze. Not in those blue. ineradicably blue, blue eyes. Not in that slender throat, nor in the little evening gown, that wasn't as smart as it should have been, the waist line was some inches out, the bow was on the wrong side.

VI

Downstairs she said to Captain Rafton, yes, she would come, not waiting to watch the effect, blurting out that Miss Thorpe Wharton and her friend, "Mr—Mr—whatever-he-is-called, would it matter?" Blurted it while she trailed herself out of the door, across this garden of dusk and darkened palms which now just at this particular second as she stepped from the roofed darkness of the paved piazza, became swirls and swirls of rayed-out light, rayed out all about, like Byzantine saints painted on gold. "These palms; now I see why Helios had for himself palms," she said aloud to Rafton who was not so formidable and dinner jacketed, at least a heavy dark overcoat and hat drawn over his eyes, rimmed, drawn forward, firm, helmet wise, made of him so utterly another person, so utterly armed against everything, even (she was sure were it necessary) herself. "They wanted to come. At least they asked me." He said to the Arab who waited with the carriage he had already driven over in, "Shaduli" or it sounded like that. It evidently meant "get another," for the man with a gesture summoned from just the bend by the wall (that came visible in this pre-aube of the moon rise) another low, very low-set, old-fashioned vehicle with the horses. The two drew alongside while Mary said, "can't we all get in one?" She hesitated on the low step, then seated, turned to wait. Mary was already in the second carriage so her question had been no doubt a matter of politeness or just a gauche embarrassed comment. The native drivers seemed to know (no doubt Rafton had pre-arranged) where they were off to. Driving along between white walls with palms above walls and the occasional open front of a shop where the lamps burned in some quaint artificial glamour, unnaturally, like candles at noon.

"There doesn't seem to be any reason," she said, "for those lighted shop fronts, though I suppose the outside moon-light could hardly penetrate for the backs of these shops are (don't you think) so stuffy after all?" She recalled this particular shop; she had found some little things, some mummy beads, a porcelain artificially weathered ibis. The light from the open bazaar threw a square across their carriage and toned Rafton's face to a more human semblance. "Against your face I see the difference of the outdoor and indoor light," she commented, for she just realised his face in the open moon-light had been like a face seen under sea-water, that curious pallor that was in some singular manner connected in her mind with sea-water and light striking upward from depth. The bazaar light toned that light into a semblance of the humanity that had stood, that had discussed with her under the jasmine of the gate, the chariot. This was a chariot, set low,—*swing low, sweet chariot*—rolling with soundless smooth ease over the road. This was the low-swung chariot, but of some intermediate world, not the gold

flamboyant harnessed chariot of the soul. The face turned toward her (the moment they passed beyond the square of light flung from the open shop front upon the road) became strange again with under-water pallor with the hat casting its formidable shadow across the eyes. Her head was flung back against the padded rim of the broad seat. Her body a little low, was intermediate, under-water, floating with the chariot.

He must stop at the government house for his permis for the ruins, did she mind, it would save time and trouble at the gate, and he spoke to the coachman seated high, square above them, swinging immediately out as the carriage stopped in response to his "*arrashe*," or whatever the word was (in spite of monotonously recurring gutturals, his speech sounded like soft sibilance of water and reed; however did Captain Rafton know these words?) while the other carriage came to a standstill behind them. "I must go inside," he called softly to the others, to young Jerry whatever he was called, and he left her, moving in that swift, professional manner, in his dark overcoat, bending under the white beam of the government house gate, a fresh white bar in that curious green under-water glamour, that shone in that curious one tint, at one with the building set back; all the building of the roadway were set apart with palms and open spaces, like low San Francisco bungalow residences she thought or even, she supposed, regulation government and residential Indian buildings. She was about to ask this "is it like India?" of young Jerry (he was on his way back to Bengal) when she was startled by the sight of Mary transformed too in this moon circle. She wondered vaguely to what she could compare the girl's face that met hers across that curiously unbelievable and totally elfin wash in of light, more day than night; of the day rather than of the night, though totally of neither, a complex between state of nature altogether, and she forgot to ask the young escort about India (she recalled now his name was Cope) for bewilderment at the aspect of Mary, Maryland, what had she been up to, that the face bent forward was now lit as with some inner phosphorescence having nothing to do with the strange moon glamour. Mary seemed to be inquiring as she bent forward silently just what they had stopped for, but she ignored the girl to ask, "Mr. Cope is it at all like this in India?" herself leaning forward and remembered instantly to inform them, "but you know I almost forgot my visitor's permis, have you yours? And Captain Rafton is just getting his now," which occasioned a certain amount of exaggerated playful slapping of overcoat pockets and twisting grotesquely on the broad carriage seat to investigate further unplumbed depth of undercoats and trouser pockets while young Jerry exclaimed, "damn it. Do I need one anyhow?" And not answering his own question or waiting for their answer, he remembered suddenly a man in the government house from whom he could borrow one, though this gregarious borrowing of papers he assured

them and "quite right too" had long since been most rigorously prohibited. He repeated in his exaggerated English public-school manner, his "quite right too," blustering, army-colonel wise as he disappeared under the gate arch. And she found her heart unexpectedly, and curiously beating, tapping out the rhythm, for no reason but that of the strange gleam, the phosphorescence not of the moon that she had just now observed—"don't marry him, Maryland," but she had no courage to voice the words while her heart tapped on invidious, "don't marry, marry, marry—him—Mary—land." She had no courage whatever to voice the words, to translate the code of heart tap and beat into words, to face the girl with her doubts, her increasing doubts and intimations, her very serious ideas on the subject of these foreign marriages, though how was Cope more than she herself, more than Mary, "foreign"? The word had actually lost its outline, was blurred over for her, though some intimation, some insistence on demarcations persisted. Yet what, after all, better had the States to offer? She, Mary had, huddled tiny, fastidious (she might even be her own mother now of twenty years ago) dainty, in expensive New York furs as much a right to her Europe (Mary had a comprehensive way of referring to anything outside North America as Europe) as any of them; as much a right as any of them to her own particular escape. Moreover this rôle of chaperone that Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton had blat[a]ntly thrust on her annoyed her. Like one bird safe out of cage told off to watch lest another one escape. This rôle thrust on her, belated chaperone, numbed her.

"We won't stay very long," she called across that broad river of light, across that River of the Book of Revelations light, to the other chariot, to Mary, as the two laughing in subdued voices came out, the taller, a little bending, as they passed under the arch of the government house gate.

VII

The preliminary, first, outstanding sphinxes seemed cut out of butter, soft, lovable, moulded by this moon-light into soft pollen semblance of life, strange moulded images, simply cut of butter, softened, very home-like, very familiar. The soft thud of the horses' hoofs was blurred, muffled by the sand of the road which was marked simply by lines of uncanny, skeleton-like trees, eucalyptus probably, interspersed with more palms; scraggy, updarting singly, skeleton palms, lost in that space against the radiant near sky. The horses' harness jingled a little like bells, infinitely attenuated, far off, with a softer sound, that of the pull and rub of the leather on the wood, a sigh as of wind, soft from a distance. The broad shouldered overcoated figure was seated, more alert than herself who was softly sliding further into this broad carriage seat, softly and delicately at rest, at peace, all the uncanny perceptions of the early morning, the fatigue, and uncanny perceptions in the Tomb,

nullified, soothed away, eradicated by this curious moon-light; eradicated, sponged out. There was no spar and silver intellectual appreciation. The intellect was to such an extent off guard, benumbed by her peculiar fatigue, that she could simply behold the great avenue of sphinxes in the early portion of the broad approach to Karnak, as strangely familiar, toned in, softly outlined, butter-sphinxes against that glamour of sand that drifted and moulded itself about the couchant forms.

She wondered (as they jogged softly) of Mary. "I wonder if Mary feels as I do," she said to the upright figure, that seemed, alert, dominant to be some familiar figure of tradition. Captain Rafton leaned a little forward, his hat shaded his face helmet-wise, a figure of tradition, totally not of the provinces, London by way perhaps of Caesarian Rome. "This seems vaguely familiar. I spent most of my childhood (although you won't accept it that I'm American) along the gigantic stretches of New Jersey. Sand and scrub-bushes. So the incurve of the sand about these sphinxes is somehow familiar. I would like to ask Mary if she feels it but when I say 'America' she sidles off, vaguely uneasy, unhappy somehow. It seems perhaps a pity to spoil for poor Maryland her first impressions of what she calls Europe, by even so much as vaguely mentioning to her her own native and so peculiarly lovely sands. Mary, of course, wouldn't see it anyway even if it were presented laboriously. She has been really too short a time away. She couldn't bear it this morning, when I said that the curious crinkled rather pernicious trumpets of that green-white hellebore and the pepper-trees were amazingly Californian. She said, 'don't mention hybiscus to me, hydrangea or hybiscus or pepper-trees or even these hateful poinsettias that are so awfully Californian. The palms even (if you will go on comparing) will eventually put me off Egypt altogether. Don't keep on saying you're American."

Captain Rafton's rôle seemed patently that of polite listener. He seemed in some charmingly detached manner interested, observant, yet himself, his personality somehow detached, perhaps thinking (as she was really) elsewhere, thinking, drifting vaguely elsewhere, vaguely content, watching the roadside where shadows cut across the white sand like dawn shadows almost, on morning snow. Yet the glamour and strange appearance of this land required some effort, lest she herself should slide into it, be lost, her personality be lost sliding, drawn inward as some bright-winged tenuous insect drawn down and inward into the honey-dusted centre of some white, enormous flower. She kept on pitter-patter; "Mary, Maryland," she knew she must chatter on inanely make some semblance of speech, appear common, vaguely disquieted by the form, stalwart, alert, protective by her side. "Maryland is exactly the sort of child, more or less, I was (but of course with a huge difference) when I first crossed." "And what kind of a child," he remarked

softly, that peculiar London speech, “do you think you are now?” Occasioning her to start, turn facing him, to laugh throaty low, water-over-cold-stones, a sound that now she heard it, vaguely reasoning, she realised she had not for some five, eight years emitted. London, the blur of London, five years war and the after plunge into this stoic career, secretary, high-brow journalist, had (she felt) aged her, far past even her some odd thirty years, so that to be called even in this jocular vein, “a child,” unnerved her, subtly aided her in this weird impression that her surroundings had already reclaimed her, that this moon and sand and these rayed-out palms were all portion of some world apart, some spacious room where she and he, twins, were close folded in their pre-birth. “But that’s ridiculous. She isn’t much over twenty,” while they jogged in that lang[u]orous trot into a sort of oasis, a group of very thick foliated palms that cast almost uninterrupted shadow across the road, across themselves, that crossed the road, black pool of shade and mingled in the opposite side (the opposite shore) with another thick planted brake of these forest palms. “I don’t suppose this means to you what it must inevitably to me.” He asked her what especially it now meant and she fumbled for an exact idea, an exact image, a short and trenchant descriptive phrase and realised again that her brain, that dart and pulse of steel that was her brain, almost mechanical in its trained daring, in its secretarial efficiency, was numbed, deprived now of movement. “My brain seems blurred out,” she said, “I can’t adequately grapple with the language. I suppose if I knew Arabic like you I could say something ordinary that would sound unusual. I can’t now speak.”

They emerged. From the thick pool of heavy palm shade out again to the open. The road seemed no longer a road. There was no outline as far as she followed it. It seemed to be simply that they were on sand, a dark moving barge, dark, steered by that black figure (their native driver perched aloft) steered, dark and silent with even the horses thud—thud—thud now almost totally eliminated. A low row of adobe-like mud huts again showed the road edge. One or two single palms. Then a tiny building like a minute domed-over Byzantine chapel (she supposed one of those Mohamedan tombs), and they were accosted by a silent figure that padded from the group of low trees by the little chapel, in white full trousers, a head wound with white turban, a levelled, old-fashioned musket pointed toward the white sand, casually slung in the crook of his loose sleeved elbow. When Rafton spoke, explaining their business to this soldier, the voice with its sibilance seemed the fitting expression of this pool of palm shade, this wave and fern vegetation, this light that flowed and flowed filling the spaces of the night, outlining the heavy portals of the Temple, outlining this more perfect avenue of unbroken sphinx, ram by ram head, couchant, cut in butter, of a white soft alabaster quality. Holding dominant guard over the heavy temple gate.

VIII

The very walls they climbed (set flat, oblong on the ground) seemed earth mounds, part of the earth, heavy and dark when contrasted with the avenue of couchant forms that below them, stretched two almost unbroken parallels toward the group of palms and the fall beyond the trees and the little domed chapel-like Mohamedan tomb that marked the old quay side before the Nile had worked its passage the other side toward Thebes. The sphinx avenue, gleaming in that peculiar moon, might have been part and substance of the white drift, snow drift of sand, or equally of the light itself. Of another substance differing from the heavy mud-like structure of the squared-in massive gateway. Still following Rafton, they turned, descended by a rough stone and earthen path, worn, half demarked, precipitous down the earth work of the massive front wall. They followed the outstanding dark form that moved alert, at ease, with confidence. "Where do you want to go?" She answered vaguely, without special reason, "King Thothmes' banquet chamber," while Mary chimed her preference "O the little Sekmet chamber," and they followed (not quite sure whose wishes Rafton was gratifying), across broad champ-de-Mars-like spaces under columns, into the enormous central hall itself. In the stark light the hieroglyphs stood forth, like writing clear marked with a slim branch on wet sand, clear demarcation of chick and giant bee, squares of crochet-like wave pattern, of broken line, of old-fashioned pot and hook. A fallen statue appeared like a snow image, or some more ambitious effort of some sea-side amateur, moulded and broken at the head, the head cut clear off as if the very weight of sand had fallen of itself, leaving the image, a thing transient, to be washed out by next morning's tide. Through infinite corridor, into enormous champ-de-Mars-like spaces. Before upright pillar carved, "is it" (she must make some pretence of common tourist-like interest) "with the lotus or reed; which is the north?" appealing to a singularly subdued Jerry Cope, "the symbol of the north?" The face of Jerry even, was removed from earthly comparison, a cap drawn close, tight lips, a curious jerky movement and singular vacant expression, "which is the south? One is north; the reed or the lotus, one south."

She faced then the square they made as if arranged for some child game, some game of run-and-catch, on some familiar sand. They made by some shifting, as Mary stepped forward, now a sort of triangle, the three of them, herself, Jerry and Maryland, a sort of triangular formation like stars when as a child she had searched the skies from a child's map, for some "easy" constellation. They seemed the drawn-in child map of some easy constellation, the three of them and now a bit detached like a far star in the handle of the dipper Rafton who was standing apart, while she turned to examine the tall obelisk, the very embankment obelisk in London. "This, I read, was erected by Queen—Queen—"

It was Mary who spoke uncertain, frightened singularly, of some blatant error, "you know the one whose temple over in Thebes, I made you see this—was it this afternoon?" "After lunch." "Yes, after lunch—" Mary's face too as she tilted back her head was estranged from association, bent back at an odd and awkward angle, foreshortened like some awkward Raphael on the Sistine ceiling. "Queen, that one with H, the house-boats are all named for" "Have—a—shoe," said Jerry Cope.

He danced grotesquely, twisting himself into a grotesque, as if in defiance of these static sand figures, these moulded snow images, and these columns so carefully squared-in with crochet-like wave lines, with giant chick and bee. "Queen," he repeated, as if for himself he had found the formula, the counter-irritant, the counter-magic against all this light, these chambers flooded, drowned in moon-light, cut with heavy demarcations of shadow where column cut across or where the enormously uplifted columns still held some cross-beam of the original massive ceiling, "Queen *Have-a-shoe*. And," he continued drunken with his own idea, throwing off like some Elizabethan jester his share, his load of responsibility toward these archaic, high and lofty regions, "King *Tit-mouse*". For himself, he had found his counter-magic and he trailed now ahead of them, following the corridor in and out, and again across open spaces toward a further wall. He seemed recalled to himself, to his public school English training that perhaps (not unwisely in such cases) proves beneficent, of importance. She herself watched them, following. Mary took colour from the now irrepressible Jerry Cope and they chattered as easily as if the broad square they stood in was some ballroom floor or stretch of beach arranged for some school girl-and-boy drift-fire picnic. "We'll go to the Sacred Lake," said Jerry, as they all joined again at the wall (this, Rafton told them, actually was the banquet chamber) and while she shook out the heavy fur she had caught up in afterthought as she and Mary had left the hotel bedroom, patting it and spreading it on the low wall where she purposed resting, the others disappeared, with a backward hand-wave, down the little chamber through the low door, completely out of that empty house. The whole, now she settled on the low wall, where her feet swung, not quite touching the trampled sand-like earth below, it seemed, was built up almost (for the image would again recur) on some mighty beach; sand and sand moulded into columns, rows of very neatly spaced but rather squat and crowded columns without the spaces of the Greek, without the sense of vista beyond, one gets even from so late a building as the south Italian Paestum Temple. In Paestum one looked out through heavy white stone unto a blue sea. Here there was no hint of the sea, yet somehow it seemed all this space of sand had drifted from some retreating tide. That they were left high and dry and that someone had fashioned from the very sand these homes of gods. It seemed natural

that they should be dwarfed. In Greece, even in so late a building as the Italian Paestum there was that strange insistence upon human achievement. One measured oneself by the tiny Niké temple, out-jutting on the Acropolis. Even in the more massive Paestum, one measured oneself and one's status by some known and intellectual formula. Here was magnificence of another order. The mere human frame was so dwarfed that subconsciously one was required (like Jerry in his very great tact and wisdom) to wear some robe of blatant indifference, of humility, of disdain. Not of despair. The most perfect of comforts was at this moment hers. Of what use was ambition and achievement? Of what possible meaning that dart and pulse of steel, of measured light, that was the very apt and prevalent image of her thought? Of what use the chariot of the soul and the measuring and counter-measuring of self against self, the adequate giving to each self its due, the self of intellect, the self of the drift and dream of anodine, the intermediate self, that slender balancing pole that held the two together, joined the two, keeping them strictly separate. Here there was no need of measure, of self-scale, of flinging (as at Paestum, as at Athens) oneself upward, stretched tiptoe to one's highest spiritual height, measuring oneself by the measure, so strictly subtle, of the gods. The Athenian made a god, strict and subtle against which a human soul could (by standing tip-toe) by making the greatest of physical and psychic effort, yet contrast himself. He was (to the god) a brother, dwarfed yet still a human relative. In Egypt there was this unassuming comfort. One measured oneself by new and as yet unpremeditated standards. Crouched on the temple wall, she was some long and tenuous insect, drawn inward to the heart of a moon-flower.

The hand on her arm did not surprise, did not annoy her. She was (as she stretched her throat, to breathe deeply in this temple chamber of the sand columns and the squat, so adequate and soothing square proportions) completely soothed, completely sheltered by the very substance of the light, that enclosed, almost palpably, her insect and dehumanised form. The arm that clasped brought her slightly to herself, dumbed, hypnotized by this strange glamour. It brought her to her sense again of human fitness and of human values. It was that hand about her arm, the very iron bracelet of a Roman conqueror that held her, drew her back, made her one with humanity, not of yesterday, solely, not only of to-morrow. Of all time, always. Her thin arm was held in some straight vice, that compressed yet pleasantly, with a sense of some unknown, unmeasured force. She wanted, as her human consciousness returned to measure herself to that, slender Graeco-Egyptian, to cling in reality, in life to the shoulders a little below her own as she now drew herself erect above him as he leaned, one elbow resting on the wall beside her.

The very iron bracelet of some Roman. She said, "I hope Mary and that silly Jerry person won't get lost." He said, "I saved this for you." He held, in his gloved hand, some small object; was it the green beetle she had so coveted this very afternoon? Was it even the tiny miracle, that couchant charm which had held she was well aware, some secret, should she then have had the courage, the temerity to touch it? The head was bent a little to one side. The hat he wore was the very helmet of one of the gallant officers of the procrastinator Caesar (here Caesar had procrastinated) his hat was the helmet of some gallant Roman legionary, alert, in bright cuirass upon the walls of the doomed Jewish city, his hat metallic, heavy-seeming in that light, was the hat of any British "digger." His elbow was bent, the whole weight of the body rested on that bent fore-arm, the whole weight of the massive beautiful Theseus male form, that stood apart, near yet separated, like a very wall, another wall, set perpendicular to the one she sat on, shielding her. "You can have it," he spoke that London-Rome vernacular and her laugh like the light answered him; her laugh, that water on cold stones, strangely lifted and lighted in her throat. Like the light, fourth dimensional, a bird, something with gold feathers swept across the silver strings of an Egyptian's throat, across the thin and tenuous strings of a Greek throat. The laughter in her throat was Greek, was Egyptian. She was uttering a sound, a song that Greek and Egypt would equally recognise. That Rome in procrastination, that Rome, conquering on Jewish walls, that London and the London digger would alike respond to. Her laugh was some sort of charm to answer the charm, the talisman of the thing he so casually, with that little surprising hiss, put into her upcurled waiting fingers. "O but I don't think," she said, "I want it," for raising the globular little object to her eyes she saw that it was nothing at all; she found an empty cartridge cap, where she had half anticipated one of the tiny treasures, the couchant charm, the green and curious beetle. "An empty cartridge cap," she said, "and what do you imagine I could want with *that*?" She supposed it was some little joke, and she found her laugh, a little harsh, a little flippant, mocking, playing (in return for what she supposed his freak of Jerry-like playfulness) her part. The hand about her arm tightened, loosened, subtly suggestive. The very conqueror's bracelet, tangible, soothing; now for just a brief moment, she felt strangely and suddenly released, happy, like any common nursemaid in the Park with any common soldier. "It's not," he said, "empty."

IX

There was nothing of rain about it, yet as she bent back her head for the first time consciously searching the enormous dome above her, she was curiously surprised, by her very effort surprised, lightened,

again mystified. For the whole thing, where she had expected far-spaced and slightly familiar cluster and group of heavily sewn distant yet defined Attic stars, was nothing whatever familiar of the sort. The sky above her head seemed so thickly sown with innumerable stars that the whole was at once strange and at once hugely comforting. So many and so near, those stars seemed unfamiliar as if the whole of heaven was in some manner raining, dripping down soft and fragrant dust. The whole thing seemed like mist, like rain, to drift, to sift, to drown and smother like any silver twining London-fog. Yet the very substance of that mist was vaguely warm, vaguely near. As if looking upward from the heart of that enormous flower, she perceived, above her head, the rayed-out centre of the flower, heavy with pollen, stable, yet sure with the slightest variation of wind or summer breeze to spill its just hovering, just clinging dust.

It did not occur to her to name or look for one familiar star. It seemed simply that the whole substance of heaven had changed. Where there had been (in Europe, in America) great tracts of blue, demarked, like some navigable sea, here again in Africa she was comforted. For the whole unfamiliar appearance of the sky gave her assurance that she, after all, was nothing. That she need summon from that tightlocked chamber of her conscious mind no willing, fervid, thin and avid servant of the active intellect. The door subtly, finally was shut. She felt, with her head stretched back, only that she was like any happy nursemaid, of an English Sunday, free. She was for the moment free from the insistent tyranny of brain, like any other servant, like any starved, overworked and avid servant.

The stars were of the softest quality; flower dust. Yet now differentiating a little, she saw, she perceived others, not giving off the blue and blue-white of any classic Hesperus, light, electric, blue light, blue-white, in some chartered navigable sea, but burning as from a common source of nutriment, great lamps, each burning like each, with no differentiating tint, blue-white, or rose or Mars-red. Each of the greater stars burned with soft and steady light, seeming to glow, to give off into that pollen dust of sifted light, into the cloud mist of the other smaller stars, heat. A heat of some softly glowing world.

Jerry Cope had quietly re-appeared. He gave the effect in the empty banquet chamber of King Thothmes, of someone who had all the time been near; in the open spaces of the banquet chamber he and Mary re-appeared, like any boy and girl, half shyly from behind a sand-dune, on one of those familiar moon-light picnics. They appeared shyly from the opposite row of squat columns, having explored evidently another route on this their return from the far Lake. "Look," she said, "Captain Rafton gave me this." Jerry Cope took the little globular thing she offered him and in a totally over-done school-boy affectation,

monkey-like, ape-like in mock solemnity, school-boy-like, he bent forward in that almost day-light, jogged out his elbows in a mock frenzy of monkey-like excitement and bit actually into the tiny solid metal. Her laugh again unexpected to herself, rang out. Uncanny, unreal, of Graeco-Egypt, emotional, unreticent, yet totally of London, and drift of mist about closed drawing rooms with curtains drawn on faces of women. Faces of London, of New York, faces Egyptian or Greek. The laughter utterly herself, the laugh of any nursemaid in any London Garden, free for her weekly afternoon, was of long past vanished languages that vanished slaves or vanished Pharaohs would alike with procrastinating officers (then as now in Egypt) understand. The laughter merged and made one all the selves, the self of the slave locked into the silver barred and shimmering intellect, the slave more lang[u]orous, yet still locked into the pleasure terraces of some Asiatic or Egyptian city, the other, the slave that held, a solid link, her everyday self, enslaved to both these others. The laughter-loving Isis and the laughter of wild Aphrodite. Yet for something trivial, common she was laughing. Because this boy, young Jerry was biting into the metal cap that but a moment since Captain Rafton at her side had said, with some as yet mysterious *sous-entendre*, wasn't empty.

In that light that seemed to eat them up, herself, Maryland, Rafton in his dark heavy overcoat, twisting, elegant Jerry, she said, "it's ridiculous one thinking *that* funny. It's a sort of old stale joke like Charlie Chaplin when he repairs the alarm clock. Anyway, the Captain says its valuable, not really to be, you know, eaten. And it's *not* empty."

"O, the Captain," said Jerry Cope, and having given a last exaggerated snap with his firm teeth, he handed back the object to the captain, with mock exaggerated buffoonery. Captain Rafton swung his arm, tossed. The object (they listened) gave no sound as it fell, obviously having dropped beyond the wall and the pillars, fallen free of the huge outstanding stones (wedges of great massed stone, and single outstanding blocks) clean into some little cleared space of desert. "We're off this time, really," remarked young Jerry, immediately losing interest in the little farce, "we got lost, turned right round and came back to get our bearings." "But do be careful, then. I thought the worst was over." Jerry answered, "by no means. Young Miss Mary here has been reading, in one of her high-brow tomes, that every year at certain times there are really things, real spooks to be spotted." Aren't you," she called again as, for the second time, the girl turned with a boyish back-fling of her stiffened little hand, "afraid?" They took it apparently for a joke, laughing without waiting to reply, and she turned, as they disappeared under that arched door of the empty room of King Thothmes' banquet chamber, to ask, "but why did you have it at all and why did you throw it away?" while he answered simply, "my best girl let me down."

Some "girl" had, it appeared, let him down and was it possible (with that dare-devil tilt of helmet-hat) he was ready, had been ready to follow up and "do in," in true *Daily Mail* fashion, this presumptuous rival? This seemed to matter no more, no less than all the external detail of the wall opposite that seemed, more than ever, cut of white clean sand, so clean was each demarcation in the sand columns, each slight breach and crack, the heavy shadow, beneath the bulbous upper portion that was swollen like the outswelling of some giant river-bud. Great fervid buds, not like the columns of the Greeks that hold in their straight fair line a sort of challenge, not an appeal so much as a command to the intellect to soar up and up. These bulbous buds, enormous, pregnant, seemed endowed after these four thousand years with some inner life; to still hold that possibility of sudden bloom-burst. They became again (as this curious thought emerged) just the columns, tall, though with that illusion of squatness that was brought about chiefly by that swelling toward the roof into these heavy sodden buds. All this was opposite her as she sat on the wall, with the cold a little insinuating about the ankles, about her throat now that she had discarded her fur. She shivered with sheer chill, sitting staring at the columns opposite, that were near enough in the little chamber to give semblance of shelter, of human measurements. "That outside," she remarked, slightly embarrassed, dismissing this subject of "best girls," fearing some too personal revelation, "is too, too huge. You could," she found herself informing him, "set up the Parthenon itself in that enormous court-yard you steered us through." At her back was that enormous champ-de-Mars-like space in which conceivably one might set up the Parthenon and have space left and over for such tiny exquisite toys as the Erechtheum and the tiny Niké. "That tiny, tiny Niké," the man's head was bent back and she felt the curious shelter, the exquisite charm and soothing quality of the form, alert, stalwart that stood, another wall. "But there," she said, ignoring that image of an irate Rafton following (up the reaches of the cataracts) an elusive rival, "that little birth-house is more sizeable". She had slipped off the wall and faced it direct, at right angle to the row of bulbous columns she had been so lately facing, down the length of a clear unobstructed path, exact, set exactly at the end of the path, raised with a row of steps, "that tiny temple or tomb or birth-house there is more sizable, about the size one would really cope with." It rose as if cut from one block of solid stone, at that little distance she could not tell of quite what material, with the moon too working its common magic, making the little tomb or outer temple look square, geometric, set square with no imperfection or break in its excellent contour, like some exquisite square of yellow honey-comb.

X

With the exact geometric image of that little tomb or birth-house there, that exact image as of some tiny Niké temple without Greek carving, without the shine and positive glint of Greek marble, that very perfect exact image in her brain, she turned, having collected her flattened square fur, shaken and flung it loosely across the loose-gathered throat of her rather flimsy black and tinsel cloak and followed Rafton across the room, the oblong room that was the banquet chamber of King Thothmes, through the arched doorway, down another path that ran parallel to the open path that had continued the line of the wall on which she had been seated, at the end of which, blocked off at the slightly distant end was that honey-coloured, honey-like temple or outer temple or small tomb. Rafton turned at the end of the corridor, between upright globular squat pillars, tallish pillars but with that appearance of weight, without the soaring quality of the columns of Poseidonia. Rafton turned as he might in any room, in any corridor, in a roofed-over space where the shade was, more evident than the light, and as she hesitated, he plucked at the fringe of the heavy unsuitable glove she had put on at the last thinking less of elegance than of comfort. It was really a rough gauntlet glove, the very one she had chosen for that early morning desperate canter through groves and tangles of palm and tamarisk, across the stone and flint and open spaces of the terrifying desert. That open space, the other side of the Nile, the Thebes side was not in her consciousness adequately linked up with this side, this ancient, ancient site of the old Thebes (the old worship) before the Nile had made its curious turn. The fringe of her glove brushed the heavy marked-in hieroglyph that even in the shadow shone clear; the shadow was so scientifically defined it seemed as if the whole pattern and structure of this enormous place must have been made at night, for worshippers at night. The very hieroglyphs shone out, black pattern even in this dusk, like pattern cut deep with a slender stick on wet and glistening sand. "Did they plan these hieroglyphs on sand like (in our school books we used to read) the Greek plotted square and semi-circle?" He said, "you're always talking about the Greeks. The Greeks came to Egypt to learn."

She answered as he (with curious child-man insistency) kept on tugging curious, insistent at the fringe of the heavy glove that brushed the carved sharp hollow of the outline of an enormous bee, "then this glove, is it like your best girl's glove?" For vaguely he had mentioned in the last, or the last but one, or the one before that turn of the conversation, the fact of best girl who had, in some manner, eluded him. The glove, as she moved it along the wall, fascinated with the idea of these strange figures, brushed now a hawk; its ravelled leather brushed the contour of the inset carved hieratic hawk. And as she paused, digging

with her gloved finger down some inches (it seemed) into the incurve (cut clean in the stone) his weighted hand pressed across, weighing her own against the hieroglyph. Her nervous, curious, gloved fingers curled in their leather inward, closing on themselves, alert, awakened. She faced shadow, the breadth of Theseus-like shoulders. The hat still with its arrogant tilt outlined across the eyes an intense mask-like shadow. She might now reach, clasp close that hand and with the two hands, like some white Calliope, imprison this Bear Zeus creature. Heavy in dark overcoat with masked shadow on his face, he was some enormous and protective god-like presence. His hand held the one only. The fingers loosened. She said (though it was nothing to her and she hated this rôle of belated chaperone) "the others, the children." It seemed with this great figure of traditional strength, of traditional mystery, of traditional power and of traditional commonplaceness there to shield, that she owed someone (whom?) something; she didn't quite know what. Simply as she moved a few spaces backward toward the more open spaces of the columned corridor, that she was endowed, Calliope, with some star power and some star responsibility. He did not follow her as she felt her way back away from the inset hawk, back to the great and more familiar bee, across the bee to figures she could not turn to scan, feeling with her fingers like one blind, knowing beneath her fingers runes were written, but knowing her fingers singularly dumb. She did not turn to read these marks on the stone, for her eyes sought, in appeal, in despair, the eyes beneath the mask-shadow of the hat. "We must go back to the children." He paused; his hand still rested where a moment since hers had rested, before with that fatal serpent twist she had so pointedly withdrawn it.

"It's not," she thought it necessary to explain, "that I care for them, for her. It's simply that her mother—" Endeavouring to explain, she stumbled on, her very words faint, colourless, her throat numbed as if that Greek gold, that stretch of bird wings, her Greek laughter had been a far imagination. They crossed now the banquet room and were out again in the enormous space where a dark figure (Jerry again?) gyrated, black like a water spider that seemed to skim the sand which shone luminous, a surface gold which must surely break through but for his capable water-spider antics, so gold it was and of one texture with the heavy air above it. Which spoke (it *was* Jerry again), become human in proportion, a human grotesque, its own magic adequate, "we saw nary a spook."

XI

In that light, steadily diffusing, suffusing as if they were really the outer penumbra of some giant lamp (the authentic first intensity of moon-light had somewhere waned) she felt (they were all jogging

now on the return) some access of caution. The light that was no longer the first moon intensity was of the curious black crystal quality of the traditional "old moon in the new moon's arms." The light, through which they jogged with a soft rush sound (the sound rather of a broad-bottomed barge passing through rushes than actually of rolling carriages) was black crystal. She felt the hand tug, with that devast[at]ing man-child insistency, at the fringes of her heavy glove and she again let out the vulgar remark this time with full consciousness of herself, her surroundings, her proximity to the Theseus, the vulgar reiteration, "then it's really like your best girl's glove?" He said quite simply "yes," and drew close her hand that even in its heavy peau-de-daim was still flattered into slenderness, in contrast to his own. She turned with her gloved fingers insistently the tiny ring he wore, a tiny black and gold circlet on his heavy smallest finger, insistent in vulgarity, feeling the strength, the static power of the heavy muscular hand. "I suppose your best girl gave you this?"

The Greeks came to Egypt to learn. That stuck torturous in her gullet. Was that sort of remark final? Where, if he were this common post-war officer, had he picked up these pertinent observations? His remark (though not answering direct her trivial query) seemed the right, the just accompaniment to the swinging of that soft barge-like, low-set, old-fashioned vehicle, to the swing and soft throb of it and the curious blackness, familiar as along some marshy American sea-river. Where whip-poor-wills sounded trivial pathos across moss, swinging from dwarfed oaks, across reed and thick bullrush; and set inland, sightly separated from the river proper, pools, just separated from the inwash of the salt river-tides and the sea; fresh-water pools from which sprang lotus, white water-lily, hieratic, fragrant, lily cut and carved, pattern on upright temple Pylon. On porch and corridor, lying straight open to the dawn. So with that moon eclipse, the light was like the shining of dim candles through black crystal now that the authentic moon glow was in some curious and mysterious manner, somewhere fallen. Somewhere behind them the moon had fallen down perpendicular, slipped off the flat stretch of sand where hillocks marked drift and sand hill and sand crest and hollow of sand trough, it seemed eventually one must surely reach a sea, the rim of a New Jersey sea coast; where inland cut apart from the inwash of salt tides, with the meagrest space of tangled undergrowth separating it from contamination, from the inwash of sea, were fresh pools, where dragon-flies opened iridescent petal of frail wing, where hovering dragonfly perched on the ivory, out-rayed petal of New Jersey Lotus.

His saying what he said, "you will look after me, won't you?" prodded her, vulgar, alert to her present, while she twisted the ring

that was hard to twist on the thick man-finger. His, "you will look after me, won't you?" with its tenuous *arrière-pensée*, brought to her mind neither near past nor far past. They were merged as the moon in an eclipse may merge, light perfectly wedded with black, the two making a third substance, not black indeed, never as contrasted to the thinnest of knife moon crescents (that very goddess Phosphor), sheer light. Her past merged, moon eclipse, black crystal light; the marshes of New Jersey, low-flowering wax and wortle-berry brushed the shimmer of the robe of dragon-fly blue texture of some incredibly slender Graeco-Egyptian. A Graeco-Egyptian was wandering across New Jersey marshes in search of those famous (even in Egypt) ivory pointed, saffron-centred lily lotuses.

Past, present, all the commutations of past and present (as light cast through darkened glass) were merged at one within her. The just past, the far past. She was released, as any nursemaid dallying in any garrison town (Gibraltar, Maidenhead) with any common soldier.

Apparently then the Greeks *did* come to Egypt to learn. She didn't now believe he was a common soldier. She didn't care one way or the other. If Zeus takes form, wouldn't he these days, take some recognised by simple people? She was, she congratulated herself, now completely simple. She could be. The very power that led her so strictly to define herself, once having let her go, was the simplest, the most single-minded, the most illiterate.

So that she could quite happily, illiterate, superstitious, believe that he was some uncommon Power. Having let go subtle hold on things of intellect she *let* go, dropped dazzlingly down, down as that moon had but a moment since dropped completely off the flat earth edge.

His "best girl" had in some way eluded him and he had tossed far away a thin, evil globule of violent metal, the cartridge he had quite simply until that moment, "had a use for". She had somewhere, somehow as they always did (girls like Daphne, like Io, like Europa herself) escaped him. His best girl in the traditional manner had escaped him and he, traditional, had turned to her, another Leda or Calliope, for endearment.

"You will look after me, won't you?" It was the inevitable accompaniment to the soft rush sound of wheels that was more the sound of a flat-bottomed barge swishing softly through deep river reeds. She remarked that their return journey was almost half over by the appearance of the cluster of low adobe-like mud huts and the thickening branches of tall palms. To this second less perfect sphinx avenue, that again drew its parallel of broken couchant rams either side of the sand road. To the single broken sphinx she had before noticed, across which the sand washed as drifted snow, giving out now no longer that dazzling inner light as dawn on snow but this other rather more mysterious of the darkened moon eclipse.

His "best girl" it seemed had eluded him and he asked her, *arrière-pensée*, to take care of him. The thing it seemed, was to laugh, and that surge of high-throated fairly subdued laughter came from somewhere (she noted) about her shoulders, welling up as if she were a very *Arethusa*, from between her shoulder blades, high, tenuous, fairly subdued laughter, which sprang from her white bones, like spreading mountain water, set in across a ridge of rock, sheltered by a fringe of upstarting shrub, rock *cytusus*, *arbutus*, wild *azalea* (she would spare none of them) *myrtle*, scrub *myrtle*, *laurel* even. Illiterate, her laughter seemed to well inexhaustible from some exhaustless spring of which her shoulder blades, her shoulders and the bird-like smaller collar and throat bones seemed the rocks, the pebbles, the white and polished stones. There was, it seemed, to be drawn from the breadth of white shoulder (covered, she enumerated in her thought, with soft wool, with a layer of silk, with this *bleu-ciel* semi-evening gown, with finally the tinsel evening cloak and the final pelt) some inexhaustible power, some power pertaining to her illiteracy. While the high laughter that was an inexhaustible spring of crystal water prolonged itself, he took in his strong fingers, felt like some amateur of textures the rather sleepy gold and black, pressed close his heavy upper hand (still fingering the stuff) across her knees with the remark, "this stuff has no body, it's pretty but I should think useless," while she saw, recovering, returning, quite her everyday intelligent self, the turn in the road ahead, the row of governmental buildings, the lights of Luxor village, the white outstanding squares of wall, like some south Italian or (she imagined it) Oriental village. The other carriage, her brain recorded, was throbbing a little now behind them, the thud-thud, again audible, of hoofs as they had left the softer sand of the outlying desert now for authentic highways. The town drew nearer, nearer, seeming to rush upon them, by some trick of consciousness, of itself, as if they stood static and the thud-thud of hoofs was only the heart beat of some close, live body. As if they in some strange exact and precious period of pre-birth, twins, lovers, were held sheltered beneath some throbbing heart.

XII

Now there wasn't any more time, for the carriage, the barge had drawn so to speak, to rest at the quay side, at the white gate of the Luxor Hotel. The carriage had drawn to rest; there was nothing more. There was no time to answer completely, finally that insistent man-child, who pulled how still (a little abstracted) at her glove. This was perhaps his idea of gallantry like any common soldier in any town, Maidenhead, Gibraltar. While she couldn't do more than brush with that *peau-de-daim* his heavy sleeve, twist with a familiar gesture, shivering, alert, practical, competent, her blue skirts close and the

tinselly black and gold of the loose evening wrap, slide, alert, practical onto her feet, stand while he spoke in that curious sibilance that seemed the speech of under-sea creatures to each other. So might dragons, octupuses, wave-shaped deep sea serpents, serpent-shaped sea-fish converse with one another. "Arassheriera," or something that sounded like it, that Arabic speech shaped (in spite of monotonously recurring gutturals) to some tenuous wave-shape, that shook and writhed like sea-grass under water, like sea-dragons, fish, tenuous, grass-shaped, grass-coloured creatures. Herself with her gold and black, speckled like a fish, *was* a fish that some sun had specked with gold that had sunk, down, down to some unexplored region of the consciousness, that had sunk, loosing in the sinking beneath wave and wave of comforting obscurity, shape, identity. That had been so freed, so loosened by this other, whose form (heavy, dark, beside her, beside the two dark horses) eluded her, while she listened, numbed with fatigue, with night cold, to this familiar speech, this speech which in the intellect had no answering tick and throb of telegraphic response, that eluded the intellect she herself had so cautiously eluded, and that was yet familiar, that crossed in grass-like tenuous lines the great spaces of unexplored subconsciousness.

He seemed to be waving Jerry aside, speaking, (now she caught it) English words that must through sheer constant habit meet her brain, call her back to her brain. "This was *my* evening." Some little scurry and searching in pockets by a still insistent Jerry, her eyes growing now more familiar with the two coachmen standing there, and the face of Mary beside him, white, a little drawn in the dusk. "We'd best get in and have a drink," said Rafton, "these girls seem cold," and they preceded him through the gate, again under palms, beside the flower borders that were now blurred shadows.

Yes, Mary said, she liked the Temple. She had of course been several times, notably last night when the moon was perfect. It was, wasn't it, she inquired, a little lop-sided tonight, but it didn't really matter as they hadn't had time to look at the moon itself, were far too busy hunting—"damn spooks," from Jerry, "which we never," from Mary, "found."

They were now inside the empty hall of the Luxor Hotel. Rafton had ordered something, she didn't hear, saying she couldn't really wait. The hall with deserted coffee tables and low settees looked strange, desolate. "It must be very late." But he assured her it was only that the crowd had gone across to the weekly Winter Palace ball. "That's why, then, the temple was empty but for ourselves." He supposed so. Last night, Mary reiterated, it was as crowded as the Roman Forum the one time she went there. "And everyone reading in hushed voices, for you could, last night, actually read; the moon was glorious."

"What did they, Mary, read? I'm always unworthily curious to

find just what those people find in ancient things to interest them?" Mary said, "O chiefly about Solomon's temple and how this measures so and so many times as huge, or else how small really the Romans built." "Well, that's all interesting, enthralling. Why must one always feel superior to the so-called *élite*?"

Mary didn't know, yawned, hesitated as Rafton again made some courteous suggestion of "something hot, it won't hurt you." But no, she rose. She couldn't tell him, tell him, tell Jerry what she felt, was feeling. She couldn't rest there, cold, numbed with that curious texture as of golden cobwebs, slightly cloying, yet, totally narcotic, soothing, beatifying about her brain, across her eyes, almost (as she turned to thank him) blurring the substance of the flimsy coat he had in that amateur-of-textures manner, criticised. "I'm really off." Mary was already waiting at the stairs. "You two won't, over your cups, miss us anyway." She was, she felt they all were, webbed with that fine light. As one might, wandering through deep Thessalian pine forests, even through the pines of Maine (she knew the feeling) get one's eyes blurred, one's face webbed with fine silver spider gauze. So here. But infinitely refined this was, and gold. She was, they all were, webbed with that fine substance. That was the pollen of the outstarting centre of some giant flower.

XIII

The cold of her sheets recalled her to herself. She seemed to have slipped from some shelf of warm, self-warmed rocks, rocks that on some hill had soaked up sun and sun and sun for ages, generations, some pollen-dust of sun that had warmed rocks on some hill slope where rock-cytisus, myrtle, scrub-myrtle, azalea (she would miss none of them) beat down a secondary cloud, of pollen-scented dust. She seemed from just such a slope of garnered heat, of fragrance garnered through countless, static years, to slip into her bed as into a cold mountain pool. The sheets against her covered her as thin layers of cold still water. Within those sheets, numbed with some other than mere physical fatigue, she lay stiff, her cold feet, numbed, chaffing a little, the one, the other. Her head flat against the pillow, her length uncomfortably stretched. Fearing to move lest some slight overweighting to the left, to the right, should release a fresh current of this cold, should let into some jagged sheet crevice another layer of this chill night air.

Her feet chafing her feet were rocks, colder than the rest, so cold that she did not literally any more feel. Yet lying in that cold under (it seemed ironically) a tropic tent-like net of mosquito gauze, she was glad she had not rested downstairs, had not let become blurred the beauty of the temple, the columns, the gigantic spaces, was glad a little stoically, for this too sudden contrast that brought her to herself

with no intermediate merge and blur of human intercourse. It was dim in the room yet there was still some slight twilight of outside moon (or was it dawn?) slanting through the wide tilted slats of the old-fashioned deep Venetian shutters, across which she had deliberately neglected drawing the heavy old maroon curtain, that fell (she could see through the veil of the misting gauze) in great basalt regal folds. Great basalt curtain folds. Half opened, inwardly slanting, old shutters. Streaks of dim light, moon, vestige of moon reflection; or was it dawn?

She could see now clear the whole day, this day, to-day, (or was it yesterday?) into which had been miraculously crowded a life, a release, a merging, a response. She could make her eager constation, could see clearly, "what a coincidence that the first day old Bodge left me, this should have happened," could say again, "but, Bodge—perhaps to-morrow even he'll wire me." Could think again, "couldn't one spoil it? By thinking such regal perfection could be continued on into every day, into everything." Could observe wryly to herself (as she became in those sheets a little less stoically discomforted, as the sheets warmed, drew her to a more human, a more cynic outlook.) "I've made it all up. Captain Rafton's only just the most ordinary of ex-army captains on his way up to Assuan on a job."

She felt exactly as one who has been under ether, that pollen dust of physical annihilators, and has come out of it. As if the whole of this strange crowded, over-taxed day had been some sort of gold and pollen, mist and lily dream, some excursion into some outre-mer where thought was transposed into form, into tall upstanding pillars, squat, heavy where the sand-coloured column ripened unto a heavy swollen bud. The pillars were folded like that, under water lily buds, like great lotus buds, half pushed through sand and river silt toward light, towards stars like a mist, winding, insinuating, making of Bond Street on a January day, a dream, making of the actual African firmament a patent unpotentiality. And slept.

XIV

So that meeting Mary toward ten the next morning, she could say with a half-ring of sincerity, "was all that empty temple real, or did I dream last night that you and I and young Mr. Jerry and the English captain had all been there?" While Mary answered, "and do come again. I missed Sekmet last night; I never seem to get there. And mama was so tired after the Winter Palace ball she forgot to leave word downstairs she didn't, after all, want the carriage and now Ali Sief (you know our dragoman) has been worrying, says the one she ordered has been waiting a good hour refusing customers, and anyway we'll have to pay for it. So let's drive somewhere. Bazaars or something if you're sick of Karnak. Somewhere anyway." She had dressed in

her usual work things, great pocketed dust-coat and wide straw hat, so she was ready now for anything. After coffee in her still delicious and nebulous bedroom, she was glad for this chance of fresh adventure. The bedroom and the nebulous associations of last night's journey, were so lovely, she could have rested upstairs dreaming on till noon. Only she was glad now with Mary's alert, dynamic little presence to urge her, that she hadn't. Upstairs her room, flung open to the morning, glowed with the same miraculous flood, as if the dykes of some impassive earth barrier had broken, burst suddenly; as if in Africa they were by some million miles drawn nearer to the sun. Curiously mellow, pollen dust, it seemed to glow mellow, a mellow light across palms that in the hotel garden turned those blades of out-rayed stiffened leaf fronds to the light, catching the same mellowness across what she had recognised in Greece, as sword blades. Helios chose wisely his palm, Delian Helios, but there his fire, electric, glittered on knife clear leaf blades (in Athens and in Delos), knife blades against a far and blue-cold static rounded sky. Here heat melted them, leaf and plant, earth and sky alike, all melted as if some dyke overnight had broken, drowning them all deep, deep under layers and layers of over-washing light.

So that she drove with Mary happily, consciously over a flat earth, beneath a perfectly flat sky. Dykes and barriers had broken. Between them too there seemed no need of parrying politeness. Mary simply went on talking as if they had never been parted for a minute since yesterday's intimate jolting through the terrifying spaces of the valley of the Tombs. "That Jerry person, young Jerry as you call him, asked me for the 'steenth time why I wouldn't marry him."

As the rooms of the old-fashioned bungalow-like, two-storied hotel seemed hardly separated, by their thin partitions, from one another and from the outside garden air and palm that merged, one almost (like nebulous rayed-out suns) with the air itself, so they seemed to merge almost without separating partition of personal self. "Marry him, marry him, Maryland." It didn't seem to matter. Without partitions. With that soft trot-trot of the horses whose hoofs began again that familiar muffled sound now they had turned out of the more solid street of the village into the sandy roads bordering the sunken fields. So they seemed in this morning radiance curiously attuned, almost as if that separation of last night had been, after all, a dream. Nebulous yet clear in outline, as if they all had merely shifted values, as if by some trick of event, they were shifted nearer the sun, the moon, both alike in their effect, not so much in intensity as in curious numbing pollen-dusting narcotic qualities. Both sun and moon, and stars, too. She recalled those great spaces, brought so very near by the mist of last night's upstanding dust, that seemed as if they would, by any slight variation of wind or weather, be shaken down across them as from the upstanding shaft of some gigantic flower.

Alexandrian by way of New York. They chattered, racially attuned. "Perhaps we ought to stop here at Koshnu. There are, I read, a series of bas-reliefs, frescoes, barges, apes, bundles, I believe of grain and inscribed possible field flowers" "Lovely, Mary; enchanting, so familiar. As near, nearer than quattro-cento, don't you really think?" Mary, though over-educated, was yet quite perceptive. Her over-education had not blunted her finer, natural faculties. One might almost, jogging along past the outer neighbouring Koshnu temple which they neither of them had visited, speak of nearer, more impassioned literatures. "Like that thing Rossetti (was it?) translated out of some Greek poem, like the *wild hyacinth that on the hills is found*, but here one thinks only of runnels, ditches, the low river margins filled with flowers." "Iris," Mary fittingly responded, "reed flowers, lotus flowers."

"Iris; I don't really think of iris here. It's so essentially a Greek flower. But *Isis*, it's almost the same thing." However it was really of the birds she thought. Living, spirits like those palm-doves (was it?) of yesterday. Ring-doves, the "turtles" of Shakespeare. It was essentially the birds in stone and in feather, in static script and in living tomes that held their eternal kingdom, like the old Pharaohs, double crowned of the earth and spirit. Birds, hawk, chick, vulture, eagle held their royal monarchy inscribed on stone and temple pillar as yet (by modern science) unassailed and, by modern scholarship, unassailable. They kept eternal guard, on things of earth, of highest static earth and man's intelligence. And here through the crowds (croquet balls of London and New York) the same forms fitted. Ring-dove, palm-dove, turtle-dove. Others, majestic river birds and birds of that curious sky space; eagles, hawks. Others too, wild iridescent presences.

"You see, Mary," she was talking to Mary as she had feared in her reticence to speak to Rafton, "I always loved the Greek so much I was afraid to come to Egypt. Lest it somehow spoil or taint Greece. But that's not possible. For Egypt is, don't you feel it, simply another planet? That we are, by some trick, sifted onto another planet, revolving in the same curve as our earth curve but near, much nearer to the sun and stars. Not that they looked last night, those stars, much larger, only we seemed to have (by some trick) been lifted up a peg, a round on the ladder, earth, moon and our sister planets make. But this is foolish trying to explain. I bore you." "Mrs. Fairwood, it's awfully interesting." They passed the first avenue, of the untidy broken sphinxes. "How can I explain. Forgive me. It's pleasant talking. Just anything, like this. You see all those people I'm working for, awfully nice, are clever, far far too clever." Mary laughed, "I should have said that first of you if you hadn't been such a good sport yesterday in the desert." "Wasn't it really awful? I still ache," she laughed. Her laughter, moderated by this simple, racially attuned companionship,

seemed like the light, mellow, merging now as if doors, partitions in herself had been broken in the magic of this atmosphere. Doors had been broken in the magic of this atmosphere, in these few hours, briefly and exactly since the departure of Bodge for Cairo and her beneficent tomboy canter in the desert. Partitions, self and self carefully housed, and self and self carefully guarded by *herself*, slender balancing pole, the self of the everyday appearances. Here jogging again over familiar territory, the memories of last night remained super-normally clear, while the jolt and jog of the desert experience was still made positive and exact by positive and exact areas of stiffness, almost of raw pain. "But *what* a pair of mounts." Still concerned with the birds, exquisite presences, she could look back on yesterday and consider those little donkeys, so essentially part and parcel of her experience, as strange lovely souls too, strange and lovely in spite of all the centuries' ridicule. Their faces, like soft, large cats. Their Arab eyes.

"The *lovely* donkeys." Self and self merged now in her laughter. Last night, she recalled, it was high and insistent, hysterical in timbre as if strung and quivering wires were suddenly, too suddenly loosed from an unsuitably adjusted frame. Her laughter of last night seemed, reverberant, to ring in her consciousness too high, too clear; this simple happiness was part and parcel of her everyday consciousness, now walls having subtly melted rather than broken down.

So that the two of them could jog back this time careless, attuned, without intermediate blurring interfering politeness (Alexandrian by way of New York) through the outstanding Pylon and the preliminary squares and broken sphinxes of the connecting Koshnu temple. "I never even stopped here," Mary said, "though the books do tell us there are reliefs and some broken things. But these temples are, aren't they," she questioned, "so very much alike?" "Yes, I myself think, if I were examining friezes, I'd rather go right back to that chamber where we were last night. Barges and apes, I believe and some curious realistic wheat-sheaves and even flowers are carved there. Under the heavy roof-beams where we couldn't even as bright a night as last, have seen them." "Well, let's then go back." They had already passed the village and the adobe huts and the outlying slum-like native settlements and were, in that morning sun, clearly already in the outer purlieus of the sacred grounds.

It was naturally with a sense of familiarity that they resumed their promenade of yesterday. The sphinxes in the morning light were obviously stone couchant, yet still with even tenour of mystery that full mid-morning light could not dispel; stone images, idols, creatures of mystery, yet with a static, stupid quality almost, of undeviating stare, of undeviating insensitivity. "*They stand above the channel of Nile.* Is that," she asked Mary, "a quote? It sounds vaguely Byronic like

the Assyrian descended in purple and gold." The palms waved historically this morning, bringing vague memories of later decades, Napoleon even. "The whole is rather like a magazine ad: or a cigarette box," she said, "that was Captain Rafton's idea. It helped no end. Took away from me that expectancy, that feeling of artificial ecstasy. Though it has been ecstatic enough in all consciousness, without artificial stimulus, and I'm glad by that stroke of luck your mother was resting for I would never have thought of coming again so soon, right on top of the moon-light trip." "I really meant," Mary said, "to bring my camera." "Well, but never mind. I guess maybe your mother will want a final peep at Karnak if the Winter Palace people ever give her time for it." They had done all this so very few hours since. It was natural that the gateway looked familiar, that even the squares of sun and shadow blocked on the floor were almost, save for qualitative effect, similar. Yet altered. As a scene, stage-set properly and subtly lighted, looks commonplace, familiar yet wrong totally by day.

"Yes, Mary, I have a fresh idea. Don't you think this seems now like an old set of wings and made-up scenery that last night, lighted by the moon and stars, was marvellous; that to-day in day is obvious, interesting but commonplace?" "Yes," Mary wandering, swinging along the mighty columned avenue did think that. "But too I think," she added, "in someway (and I said last night I thought) the whole thing was designed for worshipping at mid-night." "Except," Mary intelligently and spiritedly interrupted, "for colours."

She was right. Mary was right. Innocent and unpretentious people had a way of pulling her up, of shocking her in the midst of her superior intellectual abstractions. Mary was clearly right. Great space that last night had been merely the curious wave and crochet pattern of line and inked-in pattern (scribe inked-in passages of mystery, chick and giant bee) were, this morning cleverly illumined. Far more subtle in their clarity than any mediaeval or Italian Primitive of flattened pasture, hill and cypress on which were stuck, like animals pasted in some child's paste-book, sheep and nativity shepherd and pasted on equally artificial, yet in all consciousness equally natural, hovering flat-winged angels. Flattened to some mystic semblance, to some continuity, these drum shaped patterns were exquisite, green and stark blue cleverly painted in with yellow and vermillion. As if each squared pattern of chick and giant bee was a door, hinged, swinging even now on tentative hinge for the chosen, gifted of the spirit. So that anyone of the spiritual élite might wander, standing in clear sun, conversing even in kindly commonplaces, still held here, kindly and commonplace, yet subtly beyond to-day, beyond those painted doors, beyond the primitive who finished with design the boundary of experience, who finished and made patent a vision instead of more subtly conniving that his audience should have for himself his own created and peculiar insight.

A subtle and peculiarly gifted people. The Greek indeed, she knew, held her a hostage and she could not of her will evade responsibility. *The Greeks came to Egypt to learn.* She was glad there was no Olympian Helios of cut line and rare intellectual artistry. Should one (she thought as they crossed the first space, entered the second portico, were about to re-emerge on the second champ-de-Mars-like space), could one set up here Helios of Olympian ice and shale, he would almost, in his ice-electric-glamour, freeze these painted fern-like, grass-like hieroglyphs, this chick and giant bee that seemed compelled by some law to address even humanity to-day with some mystic suggestion, subtle, over-riding, overbearing the stark Olympians, suggestion, subtle that made one, illiterate, drop, drop down from the edge of the flat earth into some realm, deep, hidden from the curious, prodding brain.

"Like fishing," she said aloud, remembering her clear sense of release, of ease in blackness as she stood sunspecked, in her tinsel black and gold, beside Rafton last night by the carriages. Mary's crisp, "*what?*" shattered this realm of gold, where already she was submerged, but unlike last night, not so deep, nearer the surface; she was in a square, an oblong fish-pool where light fell; heavy sun-strewn water. They sat again on the wall, the very exact spot; she recognised it by the burnt-out matches, the ever so slight impropriety of their last night's cigarette ends.

"I wondered if we ought really to have smoked." Though she didn't care, didn't really think. Wasn't Rafton a sort of government official? Hadn't they all been all too circumspetial? Well, as she listened to the repetition of Mary's wild a[d]ventures, to the exact reiteration of the particulars of the proposal (she realized she had exactly enumerated it 'steenth), perhaps after all, they hadn't.

Mid-day and mid-night were essentially different here. Sitting on the temple wall where she had sat last night, she could make her formal constation. A fish sunk deep into layer on layer of sea, layer on layer rather of fresh lake water, with memory of glint and speck and fleck and streak of day-light gold. Deep in some dark layer and layer of inwash and overwash and interplay of current, leaving one released, free, inundated thus and indisserverable. To-day, at noon (now it must be) the sun at its tropic intensity (beating through the rough linen and thinnish layers of shantung beneath) brought out a secondary layer of inter-related potentialities. For weren't she and Mary in their outlook singularly, even as the Captain had last night on the home trip insinuated, alike? The same gaunt frames, thin with that underlayer of reserve power, of strength, that frequently brings certain types of thin-boned women more than their share of unsolicited sympathy. They could, were it necessary, either of them, save for the warm glow of some inner interplay of curiosity (of, put it at its real value, intellect) be taken for invalids, for thin, frayed bits of feminine wreckage. It was so patently

false. It was they, the two of them in an emergency, this type, this American, beaten and weathered machine type, thin as rails, steel-bone and sinew that mounted ponies and endured the change of tropic and zero weather, that outlasted the great blossoms of over-ripe summer rose maturity. Thin and virile, the two were temperamentally matched and physically. The sun smote alike on her and on young Mary (for all her school-girl insistence on the romantic character of this 'steenth proposal) alike, indifferently. Infatuated, both of them, come down to dots, with life, with some adventure, wherein Love might come, would come, temperamentally, destructively, but which in the end would free them.

"Marry him by all means." She didn't mean this. But what did it after all, matter? If Mary married Cope she would have her chance. And hadn't Mary, little Alexandrian by way of New York waif, as much a right as any of them to what she called with sweeping inclusiveness, her Europe? Wasn't "Europe," a symbol, a hieroglyph almost that meant winter or summer in their seasons in Nice, on the Riviera, in Paris salons, or in London drawing rooms? Didn't Europe mean to them, simply this? Freedom from social self-imposed restrictions, from maternal, fraternal or paternal solitudes? "If you think," she added, lest Mary should find her an indifferent or a careless listener or one a bit loose on the sheer moralistic side, "if you think you really love him."

She was carrying on a merely outer shell of conversation, giving Mary, however, all she asked, simply really someone who would give the expected answer to her queries. She was far more concerned with her constation, she felt it her final one, for mid-night and mid-day in her life had never been so dramatically contrasted. Sun and moon. Last night it had been almost the same save that they were confessedly at the end as night neared the meridian, cold. Now they were confessedly too hot, for Mary was fanning herself with her broad-brimmed straw and uttering intermitt[e]nt "phews." "Put *on* your bonnet, child, you'll get brain wave." She jerked the girl's thin wrists, threatening her. "Now your mother last night trusted me to keep you under the apple of my eye and I can't now after all my motherings of last night let you, before my very nose, be killed."

"But I was," Mary said, "last night, almost." "O?" "Over by the lake. I thought it was a black stone I was reaching for and Jerry caught me."

"This is terribly dramatic," she said, but her eyes and brain were utterly absorbed, utterly intent on a pair of birds that had peered there unannounced, peered through the squat columns and unbelievably, miraculously entered, even while she continued in indifferent tones her questions and Mary continued (her back turned, her elbows resting where Rafton's heavy overcoated arm had last night rested) the recital of her romantic escapade. Two hoopoes they must be. They, of course, were. A sort of kingbird, somewhat similar to those she had seen yesterday

morning on her trip to the desert, making dart and pulse with green iridescent fire, the empty channels of the irrigation ditches and the shallow pools that lay still beneath winter-verdant palm and the dead and dusty vestiges of last year's foliage. Two rainbow iridescent birds that darted now across the barren sun-dried spaces (this empty river-bed of an empty temple) wing and pulse of fire. That made startling contrast to the green, the green-blue of the brilliant vestiges of paint, spread at white heat (she almost felt it) of religious fervour, of religious intensity upon these very walls; brushes of four thousand years ago had spread the colours; no more, no less spiritually alive now, than the play of dazzling exquisite fire on those bright, kingbirds' breasts. The one wore literally a crown, a crest of tiny, upstanding humming-bird-like feathers. "But you're not listening." The voice was a little petulant. She reached toward Mary without turning her eyes, fixed almost with a clairvoyant's intensity upon those living emblems. "Not that. Some tiny lovely spirits. Don't turn too quickly. They're just birds, hoopoes, a sort of diminutive peacock or elephantine humming-bird."

Mary turned subtly, intuitively. Did not disturb the two who pecked live fire beaks into the crevices of the four thousand year old stones that formed the tiny dais just below the columns and the wall itself. "It's like reeds, Mary, with us and the birds." It was Mary who had seen, most quickly understood this. Blue, green, iridescent insect and bird colours were chosen fitly for these massive porticoes. Blue, green, Nile green, the green of wet apple leaves. Blue, cobalt, blue again, the burning blue fire of the iris. Isis, iris, wasn't it almost the same, Mary had said. Hot, burning, a blue that had no ice and shale of Attic promontories. Would Helios turn disdainful? Or would his power, rock, marble, ice, electric, blanch, and sear these porticoes? Would this sun-pool of light melt even Delphic Helios? She turned indifferent to the superiority of her speculation. To watch the birds. She fed on them, her eyes devoured their colours. She fed, she devoured colours. She felt the flame, the movement of the throat and iridescent bird wing. She felt under her hand, beneath the cool thick linen of the dust-coat, bones of the girl's thin shoulders and the fibre of her being alike intent, enthralled, almost in some flame of enthusiasm at her side. "It's like great reeds, Mary. Reed stalks in an enormous giant river, washed over and over with gold. Blocked in with gold, flecks of fish and dragon colour. And those bird feathers are iris colours, and the hieroglyphs are iris colours. Iris blue, iris green, iris bright-blue, iris wet-blue altogether different, a blue brighter than the brightest than can ever be named. You're exactly right. We didn't have this last night. We didn't, last night, have these colours. Not even in that exquisite little Niké birth-house that stood so clear." She turned to face the birth-house whose brilliant span of steps last night has so entranced her. "We must go there too."

XV

That there was nothing, so to speak, there to go to, did not in the least (seated on the warm wall of the banquet chamber of King Thothmes) surprise her. The heavy sunlight, almost at its zenith, spread the exact amount of heavy noon weight that yesterday had almost felled her, dog-weary, as she had slipped from her little thick-furred donkey on to the flat plateau that lay like some artificial floor beneath the enormous wall that dropped epic background, shelter for that flock of bright harnessed, grey, exquisite little animals; some already feeding from trim nose-bags, others like her own just arrived, gay with red tassels, and with scarlet leather trimmings. Just that amount of sun now rested on her linen covered shoulders. So that (she enumerated) the thick heavy linen dust-coat, the shantung underneath and the usual underthings, were now a shelter from tropic noon-rays rather than as last night, a very important and inadequate covering from mid-night chill.

The sun had reached, she was sure, its zenith, and still as she felt beneath her thin hand the linen and the girl's thin bones, she was not surprised. One solid, outstanding blanket of tropic noon heat.

No curves nor subtle heat waves nor shimmerings in the atmosphere.

One layer (monotonous) of heat with no quivering, incandescence nor merging blur of softening shadow. One solid, solitary element.

The sunlight here. The heavy wall looked solid, masonic, Roman.

The heavy wall looked solid, commonplace, like some heavy foundation that workmen in a New York thoroughfare had left for the noon hour; silent, empty, heavy and solid in its incompleteness. This was no dreary ruinous waste. It was simply heavy, Roman. As if workmen had this moment left it, with great blocks upturned waiting for another morning to be fitted into place. Beyond the heavy tidy unfinished masonry, stone blocks lay more casually scattered. The blocks beyond did lie ruinous, but as if from some natural catastrophe, result of some natural sudden calamity. Not blocks left thousands of years untidy.

But as if last night even, the earth had had some little game of toss and tumble. Some tropic rumbling and yawning of hot earth fissures; some earthquake had been responsible. The solid blocks lay as if they had only last night fallen. Upsetting obviously with the other stones (for it no longer stretched its span of exquisite geometric steps) the little Niké-like outer chapel or house of Power. It was obvious enough in all consciousness that the small Niké edifice had been a dream.

That there was nothing there to go to, did not in the least surprise her as she slid down with the same swift competent tomboy gesture with which last night she had slid to follow Rafton down across the oblong banquet hall, across the spaces of the banquet chamber, through the stone arch of the further door, down further pillared corridors that perhaps (this was obviously possible) had not, at the time, been there

at all. She could tempt and explore, seek out the giant bee and chick. She had no will for this. What anyway would that prove? There were assuredly countless giant bees and chicks here and about the corridors. The heavy sun lay drastic on fallen block and heavy pile of solid masonry, where a small geometric little outer temple had been last night at mid-night, standing, simple, square set, with no glamour other than the glamour of moon and the glamour of the very solid walls that faced her opposite, to give a clue, to give the show away. She might have started toward that little temple as naturally as she had toward the opposite wall, as simply as she had crossed the threshold of the further door, which was in all assurance truly there, set solid, masonic with those flame beaks still pecking, still searching in the shadowed crevices.

She and Mary swung together over the sand floor of the banquet hall. Two figures singularly alike, thin, alert, with heavy dust-coats and wide straw hats. Out of some adventure book, some wild-west show rather than of the gossamer shimmer of temple corridors, the rise and fall of harp notes and the twining of rare incense from the far "incense-land" through blue night. She followed the little outer corridor. Yes, certainly, there were hieroglyphs, the usual bee and chick. But what anyhow could that now prove or what anyhow could that now disprove? Simply that she had stood with Rafton while his heavy hand flattened into slimness her own, over-weighted with its heavy and unsuitable peau-de-daim, the very glove she had used, pulling and tugging at a refractory donkey's bridle, in their wild canter through bamboo and tamarisk tangles, across strange fields, where water-buffalo were grazing, into the terrifying open spaces of the Theban desert. It didn't prove, it didn't disprove anything. If she had gone further, would she, fourth dimensional, have followed Rafton, fourth dimensional, up those steps that utterly she had proved, were of another element?

What she herself was, she could, with the heavy sun a weight across her linen shoulders, actually up to a point consider. What Mary essentially was. What even young Jerry was. But the Captain. No. That dark horse; hadn't she, from the first, doubted him? When strange colour seared her mind (seated after the morning's terrific canter in the shadow of the Florida-like piazza of the Luxor Hotel) hadn't she doubted? Hadn't she, she now congratulated herself, always doubted him?

If some unfathomable intuition had not bade her withdraw from the shelter of that heavy hand, her hand that had felt through the leather of the glove the very outline of this very carving (for she faced it now), the exact hieroglyph (though that didn't prove anything), if she had followed him further down some corridor that perhaps in all consciousness wasn't, hadn't been at the time there, would she have become herself fourth dimensional, following an overcoated figure; by some

twist of events, by some readjusting of time values, would she, fourth-dimensional have mounted those exquisite steps that no one could disprove? Would something have happened, something extraordinary? "Oh Mary, I must have made a mistake." "How mistake?" "You said you wanted the Sekmet. This path I guess after all doesn't lead over to the Sekmet." "Well," said Mary, "there's no harm exploring," and she swung her little athletic figure out into the open, through the exact space where square, geometric, the little Niké edifice had stood, placed at the exact end of the narrow straight path, the path that led straight, continuing the line of the wall upon which they had been sitting.

XVI

That seated on the temple wall she had last night, seen things, rather seen one thing, stark outlined, feasible, geometric, did not (as she relaxed, really this time tired, on to the carriage seat with Mary on their second homeward jog-trot) in the least surprise her. Palms in the noon zenith waved above them, dropped across them shade that in that noon and sand seemed no whit more temperate than the heavy outer glare surrounding them. The palms dropped shade that fell across them (tired on the low old-fashioned comfortably upholstered seat) with a warmth, only one degree less torrid than that of the absolute outer glare, as if, in some system of Roman baths, there had entered from the first unbearable basin of heated pool, another only the slightest shade less hot. Driving from the palm basins of heat, they were out again into the unbearable white that lay glaring, that desert sand, that lay even in the slum-like neighbourhood of the first outlying native huts, clean, marble, uncontaminated. They had passed the second, the broken sphinx avenue. The animals, like cats stretched contented to that furnace glare.

So that jogging home, they half-heartedly continued their rambling conversation, and Mary would insist that if Jerry hadn't for some unfathomable reason guessed she was in danger at that exact minute and had caught her, she might, mightn't she, have slipped, "and you know queer things *do* happen in these old temples." "Mary, what utter nonsense. Of course we all read and gloat over such tales but who personally ever has had it happen? Or known anyone to whom it could have happened?" "This year," said Mary, in her tense dramatic manner, "of all years." "Nonsense." She had interrupted swiftly for she couldn't bear anything so banal to be uttered, though now (she thought she had quite stopped her) Mary said, "because of the new tomb".

"Oughtn't we Mary, rather think, they want to help? Why, if we of all people in the world have had the trial, the nerve-strain, the awful risk of this great journey, shouldn't these things or whatever they are be kindly to us?" Mary said, "I don't know, and you won't believe me

and Jerry won't say but I think *something*—" "O Mary, do be practical. If you want Jerry, take him, and God-be-with-you, but don't go on linking superstitiously the idea of marriage with any chance intuition you may have had last night. Jerry caught you. You were awkward on the loose stones. Wouldn't any boy have caught any girl slipping into any unknown dark place anywhere?" But turning now on their homeward journey into the walled-in highway of the small town, she herself faced other issues.

It seemed perceptibly cooler. The great shadows of palms seemed static, deep pools, still and deep enough to hold (even through these hours of torrid sun-shine) their own chill; cold almost, in contrast to the open space outlying the old temple and the broken spaces of light and shallow shade on their trip. These walls seemed to hold back of them deep water courses. Deep pools seemed (on the level of those square white walls) about to spill over the edges, seemed even where the shadow of the flowering bushes cast irregular shade, to be already spilling into the solid roadway, coolness, water-tempered. Coolness met them, a breeze, blowing across the Nile. The garden itself seemed (now they had dismounted, with the difficulties of fees and baksheesh settled for them by the Thorpe-Wharton's waiting scarlet-robed old dragonian) to spill coolness, intolerable almost, across them as they followed the flagging of the garden path where the vermillion and brown streaked petals of the nasturtiums recalled bright threads of exotic seaweed, of seaweed broken, cast up from deep waters. "Thank your mother for me. You've both been awfully good."

It seemed for some reason as she passed swiftly with Mary, for some reason she must in the ordinary way be gracious, thank her, thank even that little tyrant (why should she not thank her?) Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton with her high and brittle glass-on-ice laughter. Laughter, modernity swept across them, across the face of the twin cat-Sekmets, grinning their dark cat-whiskered grins. High, brittle; modernity. Glass and ice civilisation. Modernity, machine and squared-in turrets of that Manhattan sea fortress, that blocked-in Babylon that faced, block and stone piled high like the ancient square and bulwark of Babylon, of Assyria, an asiatic front, a bulwark to the inwash of terrific ocean breakers. Ice and glass, brittle, insinuating. "I guess that's mama now."

"So, bad daughter," Mrs. Thorpe-Wharton rose from the deep chair, cool, in white with an obvious great scarlet starfish of poinsettia fastened to her belt. "Here's this Jerry person," she clung, noticeably tender to the young man at her side, the young charm of the boy-features were intense watching their return, "now you *will* be nice to him. Lunch sounded hours ago."

AFTERWORD

All along this second sequence of her book-length poem [*Tribute to the Angels*], H.D. tries to assess the conditions in which her vision of a universally redeeming principle—incarnated by a multifaceted presence she eventually calls “The Lady”^{*}—may appear. This particular fragment in the sequence attempts to “capture” (as on a photographic film) this presence in its own vanishing apparition, or more accurately, as its own vanishing “impression”:

This is no rune nor riddle,
it is happening everywhere;
what I mean is—it is so simple
yet no trick of the pen or brush
could capture that impression

In the almost abstract simplicity of this disappearance, the poet must accept the idea that the scraped surface of her palimpsest should not be re-inscribed with new signs, as was the case in the historical practice of the palimpsest; rather, the very whiteness of the “impression” itself is to be the renovated sign the poet has been waiting for all along. Such an impression—in the visual, scriptural, and psychological senses of the term—must be made beyond the “tricks of the pen or brush” and become pure vision; it should become illegible, inscribed on the brink of the invisible, erasing itself in order to be perceptible at all, as the remaining stanzas of the fragment suggest:

music could do nothing with it,
nothing whatever; what I mean is—
but you have seen for yourself
that burnt-out wood crumbling...
you have seen for yourself.

(H.D., 1973, 84)

The impression now verges on a mystical experience which can no longer be captured in words, let alone seen in visible signs. It retreats into a radical silence, here materialized by suspension dots, the stammering repetition of the same phrase emptying vision of all content, and most of all by the dash that comes instead of the articulated presence of meaning. Announced and withdrawn at the same time, meaning (dis)appears under the interrupting dash at the end of the line: “what I mean is—”. The purely graphic mark of the dash comes to tear both the signifier and the signified apart, thus becoming the ultimate incarnation of the palimpsest, in which the sign and the erasure of the sign are fused: meaning is both crossed out and imprinted on the page, aporetically implying that the content of “what I mean” is the absence, or the lack, of meaning. Meaning is here made literally, graphically “clear”. The palimpsest towards which H.D. strives so arduously is an attempt at going beyond signs through writing.

This, and the back-cover text from Antoine Cazé,
“Clarid Vision: H.D. on the Threshold of Theory”,
in *Transatlantica* [online], 2, 2014,
online since 05 March 2015,
connection on 01 October 2016.
<http://transatlantica.revues.org/7053>

*

I came to recognize
“you guys are all”
as a permanent character,
as real as
the lady in the dream

who has no counterpart
in waking life,
to whom I am not
attached
or attracted
sexually
or otherwise,
but who gives off great
warmth.

She is always there.
We have never
embraced,
but she makes me happy
when she is around.

Robert Ashley,
A Last Futile Stab
at *Fun*, 1979

This edition of H.D.'s *Palimpsest* was produced for
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The singular "uh" suggests an adaptive whole of a plural "books".
The disparity between logotype (a) and its phonetic "uh" (say out loud:
"a cow, a house, a camel") is suggestive of the publisher's work with
artists, musicians, dancers, readers & audience using conversation as model
and means for writing; by way of speech, performance and transcription.

Typeset by Will Holder, using Apple's Enhanced Dictation,
reading *Palimpsest*, Houghton Mifflin, 1926.
(Letterpress by Henri Darantiere, Paris, for Contact Editions)

Copy-edited by Rosa Aiello reading *Palimpsest*,
Southern Illinois University Press, 1968.
(Linotype)

This third edition reproduces the punctuation of the 1926 French typesetting
of English text. Certain spellings are maintained with due consideration
for an American writer living in 1920s London. Additional suggestions
to spelling are inserted between square brackets.

The cover uses a stencil with parts taken from the geometric construction
of Roman *capitalis quadrata*, inherited from the classical Greek alphabet.

This production would not have been realised without
Rosa Aiello, Stuart Fallon, Tessa Giblin, Bitsy Knox,
Emmie McLuskey, Tiina Põldaru, Lucy Skaer
and Christopher Wait.

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I must explain to you first that the novel is not intended as a work of art—at least, not as it stands. It is a means to an end. I want to clear up an old tangle. Well, I do not put my personal self into my poems. But my personal self [Hilda Doolittle] has got between me and my real self, my real artist personality [H.D.]. And in order to clear the ground, I have tried to write things down—in order to think straight, I have endeavored to write straight. But I hope to come clear and then turn to my real work again.

You must remember that writing poetry requires a clarity, a clairvoyance almost. I have been too weak to dare to be clairvoyant. I have tried instead to be merely sensible. I mean in the common sense of that word. In the long run, the clairvoyance is the only sanity for me.

But in the novel I am working through a wood, a tangle of bushes and bracken out to a clearing, where I may see clear again.

H.D., letter to John Cournos, July 9th 1918 (?), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, YCAL MSSA24, Box 17, Folder 582 (emphases added). The penultimate word was crossed out by H.D. herself.